WAYWARD WINIFRED

By

ANNA T. SADLIER

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WAYWARD WINIFRED.

WAYWARD WINIFRED.

BY

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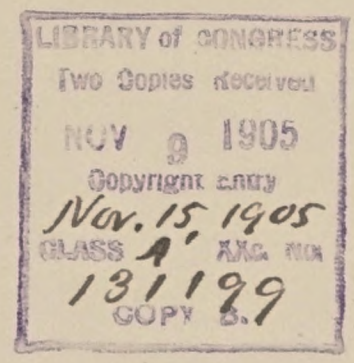

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WAYWARD WINIFRED.

CHAPTER I.

A FIRST MEETING.

PERHAPS some reader may know the Glen of the Dargle. No boys or girls may know it, but perchance their grandsires may tell them of a mountain stream which threads its way through rugged hills till it falls over a precipice and winds onward through a glen of unspeakable loveliness. They may remember the ravine shut in on either side by hills, covered with gigantic trees, some of which meet across it, forming a natural bridge.

Well, it was upon that bridge that I saw—at first with deep amazement, then with fear and trembling—the slender, graceful figure, the almost eerie loveliness of Wayward Winifred. How she had reached her dangerous position was clear enough; for her feet were like the mountain goat, and her figure wonderfully lithe and active. I stood and gazed at her, afraid to speak lest she should fall from the dizzy height. She looked back at me with clear brown eyes, and spoke in a voice that held just a hint of the Dublin accent to give it sweetness.

"Are you the lady from America?"

I answered that I was, and a long pause ensued. The child was evidently studying me, and I in my turn put a question:

"How on earth, child, did you get up there? And don't you know that any moment you might come tumbling down into the water below?"

"The water wouldn't harm me if I did," Winifred replied, looking down into the clear depths; "and it knows me well. I come here every day, unless there be a storm."

"Is your mother aware of so dangerous a proceeding?" I asked with some sternness.

A strange look passed over the girl's face, and she answered with a little laugh, half merry, half wistful:

"Ah! then, don't you know? I'm the orphan from the castle."

"From the castle?" I repeated. I began to think that this creature, after all, was a spirit, such as I had been told lived in the glens and streams of fairy-haunted Ireland.

"Yes," said she, "I am from the castle."

"From Powerscourt?" I suggested; supposing, of course, that she meant the great mansion which all visitors to the Dargle felt bound to see.

"From Powerscourt!" cried she, with contempt in her voice. "Oh, it's easy to see you are from America! Why, the castle I live in was built hundreds of years before there was any Powerscourt at all."

I was again struck dumb by this assurance. What castle could she mean? I knew of none in the neighborhood, and yet I had been studying the latest guidebook with the closest attention.

"If you come with me some day," she said, "I will show you *my* castle, and granny will be very glad to see you."

She spoke with a grand air, as though she were, indeed, a young princess inviting me to visit her ancestral home.

"Where is the castle?" I inquired.

"Where is the castle?" she repeated, as if in bewilderment. "Well, it is up, up in the hills. Perhaps you haven't any hills in America?"

I assured her that we had.

"Well," she declared, in the same lofty way, "if you know how to climb hills, and don't mind if the road is steep, I'll take you there some time."

"To-morrow?" I suggested.

"No; to-morrow I'm going away off to the Phoul-a-Phooka."

"Where is that?"

"Miles away from here."

"Are you going alone?"

"I'm going with some one," she answered, with her clear, musical laugh; "but I won't tell you who."

"I have not asked," I said, provoked a little by her coolness. "I assure you, dear child, I have no wish to force your confidence."

"It's some one we don't talk much about," she said, nodding her head sagaciously. "Granny says that there are people whom it's best not to meddle with."

"And yet you are going to this place with the outlandish name in such company?" I said, almost involuntarily.

She drew herself up.

"Oh, that is very different!" she said. "When I am with this person I am in very good company; and who so well as he can tell me of the Phoul-a-Phooka and all those other things I want to hear?"

"You are a strange child," I remarked.

She looked at me, surprised and half offended.

"How am I strange?" she demanded.

"I mean different from others."

An expression almost of sadness crossed her face.

"I am alone, you see," she said; "and I live up at the castle."

The explanation was a pathetic one, and I observed the girl with greater interest than ever.

"I should like to be friends with you," I declared.

"I do not often make friends of strangers," she said, with some return of her former lofty manner—"but, yes, I think I like you."

"Very well; there shall be a compact between us to like each other," I replied. "And the first fruits of our agreement shall be to arrange what day I may go with you to the castle and see your—relative."

Something in my speech amused her, and she laughed merrily.

"Poor old granny!" she said. "You will love her at first sight."

"The gift is evidently in the family," I answered, "of making people love them at first sight."

"In the family?" she repeated again, with that look of drollery upon her face which had almost upset my own gravity. Never mind: you shall come and see for yourself, two days from now, when I get home from Phoul-a-Phooka."

She slipped down as she spoke from her perilous perch and landed safely on the opposite shore, becoming at once embowered in greenness, a very goddess of the woods. She made a graceful gesture of farewell and turned away, light as a young fawn.

I stood spellbound, watching the path by which she had disappeared. Curiosity was aroused within me, and I felt an uncommon attraction for this being who seemed of a different mould from those of common clay. I fell to dreaming

of her as I walked home through those exquisite scenes of rare and mournful loveliness. The dark story of Erin seemed told in her hills and streams. I was also anxious to discover what was the Phoul-a-Phooka, and who might be the mysterious companion of her journey to that unknown region.

I seemed to tread, indeed, on enchanted ground; and I could hardly believe that I was the same being who a month before had been walking down Broadway, stopping to admire the wonderful products of the century's genius in Tiffany's windows, idly surveying the crowds of passers-by, and jostling my way past the Fifth Avenue Hotel. However, I had to keep all my speculations to myself and wait for that visit to the castle, to which I began to look forward with the greatest eagerness. Could the castle itself be a mere myth, the creation of a sensitive imagination? On that point, at least, I determined to satisfy my curiosity as soon as an opportunity occurred.

I found the landlord of the inn alone that evening, his labors done for the day, pipe in mouth, smoking on a bench beside the door. He was a somewhat taciturn man, less loquacious than most of his race and station, and the subject, in some way, did not seem to commend itself to him.

"The castle? To be sure, there's a castle up there beyant. A mighty fine ould place in former times."

"But to whom does it belong now?"

He looked uneasy.

"Who is the owner? Why, that would be hard to tell, though I suppose it's Miss Winifred herself."

"Is she, then, of noble birth?" I asked.

"Oh, it's not easy to say!" he replied, evasively. "Some say she is, and more say she isn't."

Here was a mystery with a vengeance.

"Perhaps you can tell me, at least, what is the Phoul-a-Phooka?"

The landlord gave me a half-startled look.

"The blessin' of God be about us!" he ejaculated, piously. "I wonder now, ma'am dear, why you would care to be inquirin' into things of the sort."

"But what sort of thing is it?" I persisted. "Something, I am sure, which we do not have in America, where we claim to have so much. Our steam-whistles and the roar of our factories have driven from us what Ireland has kept —her legends and her poetry."

The man did not seem to relish this style of conversation, or, perhaps, to understand it; for he answered somewhat shortly:

"The Phoul-a-Phooka is a wild horse, the devil himself takin' that shape; and woe to any one whom he gets upon his back!"

"Oh, it can't be to see a wild horse that this child is going!" I remonstrated.

"No, ma'am; 'tis to a wild, solitary spot, with a power of waterfalls in it," replied the landlord. "But it gets its name from the beast I'm tellin' you of."

"Oh! is that it?" I replied.

"Yes, ma'am; 'twas there that the horse leaped a precipice with the tailor that had about him the priest's soutane he was after makin'. The horse felt it like a stone's weight on his back, and down he went with the tailor."

The man told the story with some hesitation, as if not seeming to believe in it, and yet reluctant to express disbelief openly.

"It's a beautiful spot, though, ma'am; that's what it is. And mebbe you'd be goin' to see it yourself some of these days."

"Very likely I shall," I assented; "but first I want to see the old castle and the woman and child who live there."

"It's a good bit of a walk," said the landlord; "but the weather is fine, so I suppose you won't mind that."

"No, I won't mind it," I declared—"not in the least, and Winifred is coming for me in a day or two."

"And I hope she won't be a Will-o'-the-wisp to you, ma'am, and leave you in some bog or another."

He spoke with considerable asperity, and but that he was just then called away I should have questioned him further; for I judged from his manner that he had suffered from some of the pranks of my new acquaintance. I smiled to myself as I wondered if the girl had been leading him a dance over mountain and moor, or what was the nature of the particular trick she had played upon the stony-visaged landlord.

CHAPTER II.

AT THE CASTLE.

It was a lovely May morning when the landlord of the inn came to tell me that Wayward Winifred was waiting.

"Why do they call her by that name?" I asked of him.

"Oh, then, sure, ma'am, it's just because of her whimsical ways! You might as well try to stick a pin through the down of a thistle or take a feather from a swallow on the wing, as to know what the crathur will be doin' next." He looked all round as if he feared that the walls might have ears; and, seeming in a more communicative mood than before, he continued his narrative: "There's them that says," he whispered, coming close to me, "that all's not right with her; and it's as well you should know it before you go off to the castle with her. She knows too much for one of her years, and she's that wild and whimsical, there's no stoppin' her whichever way she goes. And she keeps queer company sometimes."

"But who were her parents?"

"Well, you asked me that before, ma'am, but it's a long story. Some will have it that she's not of mortal stock at all. But, to be sure, that's the old people, with their queer consates," he added, somewhat shamefacedly.

"Who takes care of her?"

"Who? Well, as for that, she mostly takes care of herself," replied the landlord, with a gesture expressive of the hopelessness of the situation.

"But she can't live alone. She has, I believe, a grandmother."

The landlord gave me a queer look.

"Oh, she lives with Granny Meehan, as you'll see when you go there! But she's gettin' restive below. I hear her feet patterin' round, and it's hard to tell what she might be at, so I'd better be goin' down."

"Say I'm just coming!" I called after the man; and, descending presently, looked out of doors, and saw, sitting in the branches of a lilac tree, the same figure that I had beheld upon the bough which stretched over the ravine. The landlord, honest man, was addressing the girl, with some anxiety, from the window below.

"Come down here, now—that's a good child!—or you'll be gettin' a fall, so you will; and a nasty cut on your head for the doctor to sew up—and breakin' my fence into the bargain."

The child laughed, that selfsame musical laugh which rang out upon the air like the sound of bells, and she shook the tree in her mirth, and sent a shower of the fragrant lilac blossoms down upon my head.

"I ask you pardon!" she said, with a shade of gravity crossing her face. "I didn't mean to send any down upon your bonnet, for a beautiful bonnet it is."

She eyed as she spoke the article of headgear which I had purchased at a shop on Fifth Avenue, New York. I was surprised that she should have perceived any beauty in the bonnet, it being quiet in shape and neutral in tint, to suit the exigencies of travel.

When she had descended to the ground, she picked up a cloak from under the tree and wrapped herself in it. It was one of those peasant's cloaks of blue cloth, enveloping the figure from head to foot, which, as articles of dress, are fast disappearing from Ireland; but which were both becom-

ing and picturesque. Winifred did not, however, put up the hood; but showed her delicately formed head, with its rich, dark hair, cut short, and curling in ringlets about her forehead and neck, and forming a fascinating tangle upon the top.

"Shall we go?" I asked Winifred.

"Yes," she answered; "if you are ready."

And so we went. Our course, at first, lay through the lanes strewn with wild flowers, primroses and early violets, with the hedgerows white with bloom. The balmy air of May, fresher and purer in Ireland, it seems, than elsewhere, gently stirred the tender green of the foliage. The lark and the thrush sang together a morning hymn. Soon, however, the scenery became wilder and wilder; rocky passes frowned upon us, and we looked down into ravines that might well make the unwary tremble.

Up the steep path I followed where the girl led with foot as sure as a mountain goat. She spoke from time to time in her soft, liquid accent. Perhaps it was part of her waywardness to show herself more shy and reserved than I had yet seen her, answering my questions in monosyllables, and briefly bidding me to beware of dangerous places. At last, in a winding of the road, we came upon one of those feudal keeps which marked the military character of bygone chiefs. Its walls were still intact, and a great donjon reared its head to the sky, in defiance of time.

We could not enter by the iron gates, still vainly guarding the ruin; for the path beyond them was choked with weeds and overgrown with grass. The child led me instead through a narrow pathway, and a low door in the thickest part of the wall, which had survived all attacks of the elements, and was, perhaps, of a later erection. Walls and roof were alike uninjured; but I had a strange feeling of pass-

ing from daylight into chill darkness, when my guide silently ushered me into a stone-paved passage, where all was still and gloomy.

It was a relief, at last, to reach a large square room, appointed somewhat in the manner of a farm kitchen. A peat fire burned upon the hearth, a kettle sang upon the hob, a wooden settle stood close by, and strings of herrings hung from the beams of the ceiling, flanked by a flitch or two of bacon. Homely, comfortable objects they were, making me forget my plunge into the past, and convincing me that here was life and reality and domestic comfort. By the fire sat an old woman, erect and motionless; and though her face was turned toward us, she gave no sign of perceiving me, nor did she respond to my salute.

She wore a plain gown of dark gray, of the roughest material, probably homespun, but scrupulously neat. Across her breast was pinned a handkerchief of snowy white; and a large frilled cap shaded a face, somewhat emaciated, with features clear-cut, and white hair showing but slightly under the frills. Her eyes were of a dull gray, very wide open and seemed to fix themselves upon me with a curious expression, which made me strangely uncomfortable. I began to ask myself: "Who are these people, and why has this strange child brought me here?"

My fears were set at rest when the old woman opened her lips, saying:

"Miss Winifred, alanna! And is that yourself?"

There was something so human and tender in the sound of the voice that I felt at once drawn to that aged figure, which resembled more a statue than a thing of life.

"Yes, Granny; and I've brought some one with me," the girl said.

A look of something like alarm crossed the old woman's face.

"A stranger?" she said uneasily.

"Yes, dear granny; 'tis a lady from America."

This time the old woman started perceptibly, and her gaze seemed to fix itself on my face, while there was a straightening of her whole figure into rigid attention.

"I have been staying in the neighborhood," I put in; "and chancing to meet your granddaughter—"

"She is no granddaughter of mine!" interrupted the old woman, hastily and, as it seemed, almost angrily. "No, Miss Winifred is not."

"Forgive me, please! I did not know," I stammered. "I thought she addressed you as granny."

"Oh, that's just her coaxing way! And, besides, it's a custom hereabouts. Ould women like myself are all grannies."

Every trace of annoyance or of fear had passed from the serene old face, and the habitual courtesy of the Irish peasant became at once conspicuous.

"Have you a chair for the lady, Miss Winifred, asthore? Mebbe it's a glass of new milk she'd be takin' after her walk."

I accepted this refreshment, partly to establish myself upon a friendly footing with my new acquaintances, and partly because I was really glad of the restorative after a long walk. The milk was brought me by a bare-legged and ruddy-cheeked girl of about Winifred's own age, who did much of the rough work about the place; though, as I afterward learned, Winifred, in some of her moods, would insist on milking the cow, and driving it home from pasture; or would go forth to gather the peat for the fire, in spite of all remonstrance.

There were things that puzzled me about this unusual abode—the scrupulous respect with which the old woman treated the girl, the appearance of comfort and plenty about this strange retreat in the heart of a once warlike citadel, where the chiefs of old had displayed their banners and manned the walls with clansmen and gallow-glasses. Then the singular expression of the old woman's countenance, and the manner in which she gazed before her, apparently at vacancy, once I had stepped out of her range of vision. Only one of these mysteries was I destined to solve upon the occasion of this first visit.

While I sipped my milk and nibbled at the bit of fresh oaten bread which accompanied it, I conversed with the old woman; Winifred standing mute, in the shadow of the deep window, as if lost in thought.

"America's very far off entirely," said granny, dreamily —"acrost the ocean; and they tell me it's a very fine country, with riches and plenty for all."

"It is a fine country," I said warmly; "but there are many there who have neither riches nor plenty and who live and die in misery."

"Do you tell me so?" exclaimed the old woman. "Look at that now! And the boys and girls thinkin' it long till they get out there, and have money in their pockets and fine clothes on their backs."

"Well, many of them do succeed," I remarked; "only they have to work hard for it. There's no royal road to success anywhere."

"True for you, ma'am,—true for you!" sighed the old woman. "'Tis the law, and 'twas a wise God that ordained it."

"I know one person that got rich without working," said

Winifred, speaking suddenly and with a kind of imperiousness.

I looked at her in surprise, and the granny said, in a soothing tone:

"Ah, then, asthore, don't be bringin' in names! It's safer not."

Winifred, for answer, turned silently to the window, gazing out again, and I was left to conjecture that here was another mystery. What experience of life could this child have had? And who in that neighborhood could have grown rich, suddenly or otherwise? When I rose to go I expressed my desire to come again.

"Mebbe you'd have a curiosity to see more of the ould place," said the woman.

"But the castle is not a show place," cried Winifred, imperiously. "It's private property."

"God help your wit!" I heard the old woman mutter; but aloud she said with conciliation, almost deference:

"Sure you know as well as I do, Miss Winifred dear, that every castle in the country, even where the grand folks do be livin', is thrown open every now and again to travellers."

"This castle is not open to any one," said Winifred, drawing her slight figure to its height and addressing me; "but if you, being from America, would like to see it, I would show it to you."

I told her that I should very much like to see it, and would certainly come again for the purpose.

"There's some stories about the ould place that mebbe you'd like to hear, ma'am," said Granny Meehan, anxious to make amends for any abruptness on the part of her charge.

I told her that the stories would be an additional attraction; and as I was about leaving the room, I remarked:

"It's a glorious day. You should go out, Mrs. Meehan, if only to see the sun shining on the mountains."

Winifred sprang forward, her face crimson.

"For shame! for shame!" she cried.

I turned back to the old woman in perplexity. The ghost of a smile was on her face, as she declared:

"I shall never see the bright sun more in this world,—I shall never see it more. But I like to know that it is shining."

Here, then, was the solution of one mystery; and as I looked at that fine and placid countenance I wondered at my own stupidity; for though the eyes were wide open, their expression told the tale very plainly.

"I am so sorry," I said; "I did not know. Can you ever forgive me?"

"There's nothing to forgive nor to be sorry for," she replied, with a smile breaking over her face like sunshine. "Glory be to God for all His mercies! I've been sittin' here in the dark for ten years; but all the time, thanks be to His holy name, as happy as a lark."

I turned away, with admiration mingled with compassion.

"And," added the old woman, "I know the purty sight you're spakin' of, ma'am dear. I seem to see, as often I saw it, the sun playin' about the hills in little streams of gold, and the tree-tops brightenin' in its glow. Oh, I know the hills of Wicklow since I was a wee dawshy! And there isn't a tree nor a blade of grass nor a mountain flower that Granny Meehan doesn't remember from old days that are far off now."

I saw that Winifred's sensitive face was working with emotion, while her eyes filled with tears. I also saw that

she had hardly forgiven me yet for my blunder. I suggested gently that we had better go, and the girl made no objection. So we pursued our homeward way, silently for the most part. Suddenly, I exclaimed:

"Oh, what a beautiful nature has that old woman!"

"Do you mean granny?" Winifred asked quickly. "Oh, she's as beautiful as—the Dargle!"

And even while we talked burst upon us that view, which, once seen, can never be forgotten. Those hills arising on either side, clothed in a superb, living green; and the loveliest of glens below, with the rippling beauty of its stream fair as the poet's river of the earthly paradise; and Powerscourt's splendid demesne to the eastward, and all the mountains about, arising grandly, enlivened with that unsurpassed sunshine.

"Ye hills, give praise to God!" I murmured involuntarily; and paused, feeling Winifred's dark eyes upon me, with inquiry in their glance.

"It is a verse from the hymn of thanksgiving sung often in church," I said. "Did you ever hear it?"

Winifred shook her head.

"They don't sing much in the chapel down below," she said, "except simple little hymns. It isn't like the grand days when the castle was full of people and the abbey church was close by."

Then she paused, as if she did not care to say more; and as we were now within sight of the hill she suddenly left me, waving her hand in farewell, and swinging herself by the tree-bridge across the mountain-stream.

"Good-by!" she called back to me. "And don't forget next time that granny is blind."

CHAPTER III.

WINIFRED ASKS QUESTIONS.

THE morning after my visit to the castle I set out early to enjoy the beauties of the Glen, having first partaken of breakfast and enjoyed a little chat with my landlord, who was growing accustomed to my American inquisitiveness.

"Sure she's a fine woman is Granny Meehan!" he said, in answer to some opinion I had given concerning her; "an' a religious woman, too, and very knowledgeable for her station. But her head is full of queer consates. I think it's most turned by livin' up beyant alone so long."

"How did she come to have the care of Miss Winifred and to live in the old castle?" I inquired.

"Well, none of us knows—that is, to be sure about it. Master Roderick, he was a gay, sportin' lad. I mind him well, tearin' about the country on his white horse, stoppin' a night now at the ould place above; and away agin, no one knew whither. His father, who owned the place before him and lived in it every year for a few weeks, was dead and so were all belongin' to him." The landlord drew breath and lowered his voice somewhat. "Well, in some of his wanderin's about the country what does he do but get married, an' we never seen the bride down here at all, at all; but it was the talk of the country-side that she was of a fine ould

stock an' a rale lady. But he never brought her next or nigh the ould place. Perhaps it was ashamed of its bein' ruinous-like or afeard of the gossip of the country-side."

I listened with the deepest attention.

"It was on All-Hallow-Eve that Winifred there came to the castle. Mrs. Meehan, who had been nurse to Master Roderick himself, was brought up from the village in haste. Fires were lighted, beds got ready, and toward nightfall a gentleman in black rode up to the castle door. Now, some that saw him say it was the young gentleman himself riding his white horse, but more says it was a stranger; and coming the way he did and on that night of all nights! It's a quare story, and no wonder that the child's different from other childer."

"How old was she when she came?"

The landlord reflected.

"Well, I think it would be about seven, though none of us ever rightly knew."

"Did the father visit her?"

"From that time to this," said the landlord, impressively, "he was never seen in the country-side. There seemed to be some secret or other in the business; and Granny Meehan never opened her mouth about it, only bowin' and scrapin' with Miss Winifred here and Miss Winifred there. Some do say that she's afeard of the colleen, and knows well enough that she's not of mortal stock. But that's the ould people!" he concluded, with a toss of the head. "Meself thinks she's Master Roderick's daughter; though why he should give her up and never come near her is more than any mortal can tell."

"It is a curious story," I said; "quite a romance, and fits in well with your lovely country here and the remains of

that grand old castle. But who is this curious companion Winifred goes about with and does not care to name?"

"There's more than her that won't name him," said the landlord; "though I think it's Granny Meehan that does be cautionin' the colleen. She's not afeard of man nor beast nor spirit, and if she doesn't name him it's on account of the ould woman."

"But who is he?"

"Now, ma'am dear," said the landlord, "I have been discoursin' to you already of things that mebbe shouldn't pass my lips, and I'd be entirely obliged if you wouldn't ask me to have part nor parcel with them that's unlucky, nor so much as to name them."

With this I had to be content, and I strolled out to that world-famous Glen of the Dargle, and sat down beside the stream on grass that was green and soft as velvet. Above me on all sides rose the hills, the trees, in their shaded green, still sparkling with dew; the waterfall dashing over the stones into the dark stream below, and the tree-bridge overhanging that terrible ravine. I might not at first have perceived that this bridge was tenanted had not a clear voice suddenly broken the stillness, thrilling out some quaint melody, which was Irish in its wild, mournful character, and yet had a tinge of drollery. I did not recognize it, however, nor could I have called it by name. I looked up hastily, well knowing that the graceful figure and charming, childish face of Winifred would meet my view. Once again, as on a former occasion, I hesitated to speak for fear of startling her; but she addressed me presently, bringing her song to a sudden stop.

"Good morning!" she said. "'Tis lovely weather."

"Lovely indeed," I answered, looking up at her and reflecting what a strange little creature she was, talking down to

me as calmly from that high and perilous perch as though she sat on a rocking-chair at a fireside.

"My dear child," I said, involuntarily, "you make me dizzy."

"Dizzy?" repeated the girl.

"Being up so high and over that deep ravine," I called back; for the noise of the waterfall forced me to raise my voice in order to be heard.

"The dear old Dargle!" she exclaimed, looking lovingly down at the stream. "I sit here, as I told you, almost every day. But I'll come down immediately if it makes you dizzy."

She carried out her promise so swiftly and so recklessly that it fairly took away my breath. She stood a moment or two on the green height, and then ran down to me, her face shining with the glow of the morning, full of life and health and the very joy of being alive. She was soon at my side and threw herself near me on the grass.

"Do you like Ireland just as well as America?" she asked me after a pause.

"Ireland is very beautiful," I replied.

Her face flushed and her eye lighted as she nodded two or three times, but did not speak. It was as though some one very dear to her had been praised.

"I was told once," she said, "that streets in America are paved with gold. But—perhaps it isn't true." She said the last words wistfully, as though reluctant to part with an illusion. "And I suppose," she went on, "there are no trees there with golden leaves nor birds with silver wings?"

"No," I said; "there are no streets paved with gold, and no golden trees nor birds with silver wings. But there are many beautiful things—glorious mountains, vast forests, broad rivers, splendid cities."

"I should like to hear of them some time," she said, "if you will be kind enough to tell me."

"Oh, I shall tell you anything you want to hear," I replied; "for, as we agreed to be friends, one friend must try to give pleasure to another."

"Yes, that is true," she assented; "and because of that I will show you my castle, though I don't like showing it to strangers."

I looked at her with an interest which was enhanced by the story I had heard that morning—pathetic, romantic, and altogether unusual.

"You have always lived there?" I asked.

"No," she said, briefly. "I remember to have lived at another place, but that is very long ago and does not matter."

It was evident that she did not wish to continue the subject.

"I shall have to leave you," she said, all at once; "for, listen! I hear the tinkle of a bell, and I am afraid that our cow has got out."

"Do you take care of the cow?" I asked involuntarily; for the circumstance somehow seemed surprising and out of keeping with the child's appearance.

"Oh, Moira does generally!" she replied carelessly. "She, you know, is our little maid-of-all-work. Sometimes I do myself, though; for I love poor Cusha, and I like to pat her silky back and play with her long ears. She hasn't any horns. But she wouldn't hurt me if she had; for, you see, she knows me, and puts down her head for me to pet, and lows when she sees me coming. She is a very wise cow. I wish she could talk."

"I wonder what her conversation would be like?" I said, laughing.

"Oh, I know!" answered the child, confidently; though she laughed, too.

"You do? Well, let me hear it!" I said, entering into her humor.

"She'd talk about the sweet green clover and the grass and the fields, where she has lived; and about the hills, for she's been up here a great many years. She was born before I was, and she looks at everything with her big brown eyes as if she were thinking about them. She might be able to tell if there were any fairies or things of that kind; for she's out sometimes in the moonlight, or at dusk and in the early morning, too, when people say they pass by."

"You mustn't believe all the people tell you," I answered, though I was half sorry for the suggestion when I saw how her face clouded over. "Their tales might be like the golden streets and the silver birds."

She arose slowly, and seemed as if about to turn away; then she added, half to herself:

"I wonder if she knows anything about what *he* is trying to find out, what he *has* found out?"

"Who?" I asked hastily.

"Some one," she said, evasively. "Oh, the bell is tinkling again. Cusha might get lost. Good-by! And come soon to the castle. I will show you every bit of it and tell you *true* things about it."

She said the last words loftily, as though to let me know that all her talk was not of the unreal, the fictitious, the poetic. I sat a few minutes longer musing over her and her story; and then began to read, perhaps as an offset, a trans-atlantic fashion paper which had reached me by mail that morning.

CHAPTER IV.

A SINGULAR FIGURE.

I WAS presently tempted to think that my landlord was right when he spoke of the "queer company" which Winifred sometimes kept. For, as I was rambling about one evening under the white blossoms of the hawthorn, I suddenly beheld her high up on a mountain pass. This time she was without her blue cloak, but wore a shawl of vivid scarlet, the corner of which she had wound about her head. Contrasting with the emerald green of the grass and the foliage all about her, she seemed more than ever like a mountain sprite who had suddenly sprung from the ground.

I was about to advance and address her, when I perceived that she was not alone. Beside her, upon the greensward, stood one of the wildest and most singular figures it has ever been my fortune to see. He was tall, and would have been of commanding presence but for a slight stoop in his shoulders. His hair, worn long, was dishevelled and unkempt, surmounted by a high-peaked, sugar-loaf hat, the like of which I had never seen before. His breeches were of corduroy, such as might be worn by any peasant in the vicinity; only that this particular pair was of a peculiarly bright green, vivid enough to throw even the grass of the Emerald Isle into the shade. A waistcoat of red increased the impression

of color. He might have been some gigantic tropical plant, so gorgeous and so varied were these commingling hues. Over all he wore a garment, neither coat nor cloak, with wide, hanging sleeves. His countenance was as singular as his costume; his eyes keen, yet half-furtive, half-deprecating in their expression; his chin clean-shaven, showing the hollow, cavernous cheeks with fearful distinctness. His nose, long and slightly hooked, seemed as if pointing toward the ground, upon which just then his eyes were fixed.

He was discoursing to the child; and, as I came nearer, I thought he was using the Irish tongue, or at least many Gaelic words. Once he pointed upward to the sky with a wild gesture; again he bent down to the earth, illustrating some weird tale he was telling; whilst expressions of anger, of cunning, of malice or of joy swept over his face, each being reflected in the mobile countenance of Winifred, who stood by. She seemed to follow every word he said with eager interest.

In a pause of the narrative he took off his hat and made a courtly bow to the child, who held herself erect before him. Resuming his talk, he pointed more than once in the direction of the castle, so that I fancied he was dwelling upon the fortunes of the race who had once abode there and of the chiefs and heroes who had made it famous. Once, however, I caught the name of Malachy, which might have been that of any peasant in the neighborhood; and again the word "Lagenian." Then the old man relapsed into silence, sighing profoundly; whilst above his head the dark leaves waved softly and the projecting branches almost touched his hat.

Winifred finally broke the silence—I heard her clear, childish voice distinctly:

"Ever since we went to the Waterfalls that day I have been wanting to talk to you of the Phoul-a-Phooka."

"But I have told you, Miss Winifred," the man replied, with some impatience, "all that I know. The Phooka is a fierce beast, with fire streaming from his eyes and nostrils, coal-black and gigantic of size. That is how the legend describes him; and if any unlucky wayfarer meets him he is compelled to mount and ride. The place which I took you to see is called after him. You know how lovely it is, how wild, how solitary, and how well suited to the work I have in hand. I made discoveries there, Winifred—indeed, I did!"

Here his voice dropped to a whisper, and Winifred put two or three eager questions to him.

"But you didn't tell me when we were there," she said.

"It was better not. We have had listeners," the man responded.

"I was thinking," Winifred went on, changing the subject abruptly, "of that story of the tailor. You know, if the Phoul-a-Phooka had ridden down that precipice we saw, with him upon his back, why, the tailor couldn't have told what happened; for he would have been killed."

"There's no saying, there's no saying!" replied the stranger, absently. "There are mysteries, my girl; but the legend declares that it was the garment which the tailor carried that caused the beast to throw him off."

"Are legends true?" the girl asked.

"Who knows?" answered the old man, with the same dreamy air. "They hold a kernel of truth, every one of them."

"The lady says many things are not true," Winifred observed.

"The lady! What lady?" demanded the other almost fiercely, with a light of cunning gleaming from his black eyes.

"The lady from America."

"Oh, from America did you say?" exclaimed the man, in a hushed and trembling voice, bending low and looking about him with a terror and anxiety which were almost grotesque. "Don't say that word, Miss Winifred! Don't now, my beautiful white flower of the mountain!"

The incident reminded me that Granny Meehan at the castle had also shown, on the occasion of my visit, a certain alarm at the mention of America; and I wondered what mystery enveloped this singular child and those who were her guardians. Winifred had perceived the man's consternation; looking intently at her singular companion, she asked:

"Why, are you afraid of people from America?"

Standing thus before the old man, she put the question with the point-blank frankness of childhood.

"No, no, no!" came the answer, hurriedly and with the same tone of tremulous eagerness,—"at least, child, it is not the kind of fear you think."

"Why do you shiver, then, and look like that?"

"Because, O Winifred mavourneen, say it is not for you she's come!"

"For *me!*" echoed Winifred in astonishment; then she burst into one of her merriest peals of laughter, seizing a handful of leaves and throwing them at him. "Why do you think that, you dear, old Niall?"

"I suppose I'm getting old and full of fears," the man said. "The winter of life is like the winter of the years. It has its chills and frosts, its larger share of darkness. But what if one should come and take you away before we are ready—before the work we have to do is done?"

"No one shall take me away unless I like!" Winifred cried out, throwing back her small head proudly.

"Wilful I know you are as a mountain torrent," Niall answered with a smile; "but there are some who might take you away against your will and with none to say them nay."

"I wish you would not talk so!" Winifred said petulantly, tearing to pieces with her slender, delicate fingers a daisy which she had picked up from the grass. She threw the stalk away impatiently. "There!" she cried. "By your foolish talk you have made me destroy one of my own little daisies; and I always think of them as little children playing in the long grass, hiding from one another, letting the wind blow them about, and loving the sun, as all children do."

The strange man gazed thoughtfully at her as she spoke.

"The same old fancies!" he muttered; "the same turn of mind! But I think the country people are right: she's too wise. She has an old head on young shoulders; too old a head for a child."

It was Winifred's turn to stare at Niall.

"Why are you talking to yourself like that?" she asked. "It isn't polite."

But the old man, who had been suddenly seized with a new idea, clasped his hands as if in desperate anxiety, and bent toward the child, crying:

"You didn't tell her, daughter of the O'Byrnes—you didn't tell her? Oh, say you didn't! For that would mean ruin—utter, blank ruin."

Winifred looked at him with a flash of scorn that darkened her blue eyes into black,—a look of lofty indignation which struck me forcibly.

"So that's all you know of me, Niall," she cried, "after the years that we've walked the glen together, and up the passes of the Croghans and down by the streams! You think

I could betray what I know to the first stranger that crosses my path!"

The man was struck dumb by the passionate cadence in the young voice, which went on reproaching, upbraiding, as some spirit of the mountain might have done.

"Oh, you're a nice companion for me when you could say such a thing—you that taught me the secret of the stars, and how they shine down, down just on the spot where that which we seek lies hidden, and after showing me its gleam in the shining waters!"

"Miss Winifred," cried the old man, "forgive me!" And he bent one knee before her. "I was thinking of the ordinary child, with its love of telling news; and not of the young lady, with the old blood in her veins and a mind of uncommon acuteness."

"I don't want you to kneel to me," she said gravely, in her princess-like manner. "You're old and I'm young, and you should not kneel. Neither should I have spoken to you as I did. But you must not doubt me—you must not believe I could betray your secret."

"Then you forgive me?" said the old man. "And, to show you how I do trust you, I'm going to give you another present, mavourneen. Oh, the like of it you never saw!"

He drew from his pocket as he spoke some object carefully wrapped up in a handkerchief; but as he unwound the wrapping I distinctly saw the gleam of gold, and, to my astonishment, a very beautiful gold bracelet, apparently highly wrought. The old man displayed it upon a leaf which made a charming background. Winifred clapped her hands and fairly danced with joy, her eyes shining and her face glowing.

"Oh, is that for me, you dear, good Niall?" she exclaimed,

For the third time in my hearing she called the man by his name.

"It is for you, child of my heart, my beautiful little lady!" said the man, gratified by her enthusiasm.

"It is the most beautiful, far the most beautiful, you have given me yet."

"It is a rare gem of art, of faultless carving and of the purest gold," said Niall, triumphantly.

"Where did you get it, pray?" asked the child.

The answer I did not hear, for the man stooped low and spoke in a whisper. I feared that, being discovered, I should find myself in an awkward predicament; so I thought only of beating a hasty retreat. In so doing I stumbled and fell. Fortunately, it was upon soft moss—the kindly breast of Mother Nature.

Winifred's keen eyes saw what had occurred, and she ran instantly to my assistance. I assured her that I was not hurt, and, on rising, looked about for her strange companion. He had disappeared as completely as if the grassy sward had opened and swallowed him. The child did not say a word about his having been there; and, for some unexplained reason, I felt that I could not ask any questions. There was about her more than ever on this occasion that air of pride and reserve which was sometimes so noticeable.

As soon, however, as she saw that I was unhurt she left me in a rather more unceremonious fashion than usual. She feared, perhaps, that I might refer to her conversation with the man whom she had called Niall. I watched her walking away more thoughtful than usual, her step scarcely touching the grass, so light was she; and I marvelled at her singular destiny.

When I reached the inn I took the landlord into my con-

fidence, to the extent of telling him that I had seen Winifred in company with a peculiar-looking man, and that he had seemed disturbed when she spoke of the lady from America. As I had overheard a chance conversation, I felt bound, of course, to say nothing of the bracelet, or of certain other allusions in the old man's discourse which had puzzled me.

"Some do be sayin' that he has the Evil Eye," remarked the landlord, referring to Niall; "and, though meself doesn't hold much with them ould notions, there may be somethin' in what they say, after all. For the colleen bringin' you into the discoorse mebbe turned his ill-will upon you and caused, p'raps, the fall you had."

I smiled at this, assuring him that the fall had a very natural cause, my foot having caught in the root of a tree. But I could see that he was still unconvinced and regarded Niall as a more dangerous individual than ever. And, finding it useless to argue, I retired to my room to think over the events of the morning.

CHAPTER V.

A SECOND VISIT TO THE CASTLE.

It was not so very long after this occurrence that, led on by the beauty of a moonlight night, I wandered somewhat farther than usual from the inn. The soft radiance of the full moon was streaming down over that exquisite landscape. I stood and gazed at a tiny stream which lay sparkling and shimmering with magical brilliancy; and as I did so I saw, coming through the dark masses of foliage on a mountain path, the same figure which I had before seen in company with Winifred. The man's outline seemed larger and more gaunt than before. I presume this was due to the uncertain, flickering light of the moon through the trees.

An impulse urged me to conceal myself. I slipped into the shadow and watched Niall approach, with a curiosity which was full of awe. His head was up in the air, so that he resembled those magicians of old who read the stars and pretended to discover in them the secrets of the future. It was evident that he was making some calculation; for he stopped from time to time, counting rapidly on his fingers.

He finally advanced close to the edge of the stream and knelt down. He peered into the clear depths so keenly that it seemed as if he were counting the pebbles on the bottom. All the time he muttered to himself, but quite unintelligibly, so that I caught not a word. At one point, where the rivulet was shallow, he felt with both hands very carefully for some time, taking up and throwing down again handfuls of clay or pebbles.

Suddenly he threw up his arms with a strange, triumphant exultation; and, rushing in among the trees, he brought out something which seemed like a crock. He placed it beside the stream; and then, as I still watched and waited, his jubilation gave place to caution. He began to look all about him, stooping and shading his eyes with his hand so that he might better penetrate the gloom, while he turned his head in every direction. I wondered what he would do if he should discover me. The idea was, to say the least, uncomfortable at such a time and in such a place. All around darkness save for the light of the moon; everywhere the intense stillness and solitude of a rustic neighborhood, in which all the world sleeps save those "who steal a few hours from the night." I was alone with this singular being, whose wild, grotesque appearance was enough to frighten any one; and once I thought I saw his burning eyes fixed upon me in my hiding-place.

I scarce dared to breathe, fearing that every moment he would pounce upon me and drag me forth. But it was soon evident that he did not see me. His face lost its watchful look, and he advanced once more toward the moon-whitened stream where he had left his crock. He cast a hasty glance upward and I heard *gealach*—the Gaelic word for the moon—pass his lips, coupled with that of Winifred; and then he began to take up what seemed like mud from the bed of the stream, filling the crock rapidly.

When this was full, he seized the vessel and disappeared at a fearful rate, as it seemed to me, up the steep path by which he had previously descended. I was conscious of a great relief when I saw him vanish in a turn of the road; for there had been something uncanny even in the huge shadow which he cast behind him, and which brought out the weirdness of his figure and of his garments, as well as of his won-

derful, sugar-loafed hat. I was afraid to come out from my hiding-place for some time, lest he might be looking down upon me from some dark place above.

I went home, with a firm determination to discover, if possible, who was this singular person, what were his pursuits, and whence he had come. I felt that on Winifred's account, at least, I should like to know more of her ill-chosen companion. I was certain that the landlord, though a natural gossip once his tongue was unloosed, would relapse into taciturnity if I strove to make him throw light upon this mysterious subject. My only hope lay in Granny Meehan. She seemed a reasonable and conscientious woman, certainly devoted to the girl. Therefore I would appeal to her to discover if Niall were worthy of her confidence, if his dreamy and unsettled condition of mind made him a suitable companion for Winifred, and if such companionship would not disgust her with the realities of life, prevent her from acquiring a solid education and the training which befitted the station to which I believed her to belong.

I had become deeply interested in the girl, though I had not as yet formed the project, which later developed itself, of taking her with me to America and putting her in one of the celebrated convent schools there. Her condition even then seemed to me a sad and perilous one: her only guardian apparently a blind woman, who, despite her devoted affection, had neither the power nor, perhaps, the will to thwart Winifred in anything. The girl's nature seemed, on the other hand, so rich in promise, so full of an inherent nobility, purity, and poetry, that I said to myself, sighing:

"No other land under the sun could produce such a daughter—one who in such surroundings gleams as a pearl amongst dark waters."

I paid my second visit to the castle, therefore, on the very day after my moonlight glimpse of the mysterious Niall. It was a bright morning, flower-scented and balmy, with that peculiar balminess, that never-to-be-forgotten fragrance of the Irish atmosphere in the May time of the year. I stood still to listen to a wild thrush above me as I neared the castle, and the thrilling sweetness of its notes filled me with something of its own glee. Winifred was in the old courtyard feeding some chickens, gray and speckled and white, with crumbs of oaten bread and a bowlful of grain. She was laughing gaily at their antics and talking to the fowls by name:

"No, Aileen Mor! You're too greedy: you're swallowing everything. Gray Mary, you haven't got anything. Here's a bit for you. No, no, bantam Mike, you can't have any more; let the hens eat something!"

The large speckled fowl that Winifred had first addressed stalked majestically to and fro, snatching from its weaker brethren every available morsel; while the little ones ran in and out, struggling and fighting in the most unseemly manner over the food Winifred let fall.

The child, on seeing me, nodded gaily.

"See," she said, "how they fight for their food! They're worse even than children!" Then she added in her pretty, inquiring way, with the soft modulation peculiar to the district: "I suppose, now, there are a great many fowls in America?"

"Oh, yes!" I replied—"fowls of every sort. I think you will have to come to America some time and see for yourself."

A flush passed over her face, making it rosy red; then she said, with the curiously imperious manner which I had so often before noticed:

"I *am* going there some time: I *have* to go."

She turned once more to the chickens, silently this time; and her manner, as plainly as possible, forbade me to question her. No child had ever impressed me in this way before. It was not that she was unchildlike nor what might be called old-fashioned; but she had that about her which was partly the effect, no doubt, of the peculiar deference with which she was treated by the blind woman and by Niall the wanderer.

"I suppose I may see Granny?" I remarked; and she answered:

"Oh, yes! She will be very glad. She is always in there near the hearth."

I was glad that Winifred showed no disposition at the moment to abandon her occupation of feeding the fowls; for I wanted to have at least a few words with good Mrs. Meehan on the subject of Winifred's association with the grotesque personage whom local tradition seemed to invest with unusual if not unholy powers. I passed through the stone passage, and, entering the square room, found the blind woman, as before, in statuesque attitude near the hearth, where on this occasion no fire was burning, its place being filled by an enormous bunch of clover, placed there by Winifred. The blind woman recognized me the moment I spoke.

"You're heartily welcome, ma'am!" said she, smiling; and we went on to exchange a few commonplaces about the weather and so forth.

It was a still day without, and we heard every once in a while the voice of Winifred calling out her commands to the fowls; and presently she was in conversation with some one whom Mrs. Meehan explained to be Moira, their little maid-of-all-work.

"Sure, then, Miss Winifred, we might go the night with Barney to bring home some of the sods of peat. Barney will be havin' the cart out, an' we may as well have the drive," Moira said.

"Yes, I think I will go," said Winifred, "after the May prayers at the chapel. I'm going, when tea's over, to pick a great posy for the Blessed Virgin's altar. But it will be moonlight and we can go after."

"To be sure, we can, miss," assented Moira; adding the information that "Barney got a power of fine fish the day, an' he sold it all at Powerscourt, barrin' one big trout that's for yourself, Miss Winifred. An' the gentry over there gave him two shillin's, but he's puttin' them by to take him to Ameriky."

"Every one has a craze for America," said Winifred's clear voice. "Even *I* am going there some day."

"Musha, then, an' I hope you'll take me with you!" cried Moira, coaxingly; "for what would I be doin' at all, at all, without yourself?"

"We'll see when the time comes," declared Winifred. "I might take you—that depends. But you'd better not say anything about it; for perhaps if people got talking we mightn't go at all."

"I'll be as secret as—as the priest himself in the confessional!" promised Moira. "An' that's secret enough. But I can't help wonderin' what it would be like out there?"

"It's a splendid place they say, with mountains and rivers," began Winifred.

"Sure an' we have enough of them ourselves, with no disrespect to them that tould you," said Moira.

"In America they are different," said Winifred, grandly. "And, then, there are great forests—"

Moira scratched her head dubiously.

"With deer and Indians in them."

"I'm afeard of Indians," commented Moira promptly. "I read a terrible story about them once in a book that Father Owen gave me."

"Oh, well, we shan't be very near them if we go!" explained Winifred. "And it would be very fine to see them at a distance."

"I'd rather not see them at all, if it's the same to you, miss," declared the determined Moira.

"The deer, then, and the buffaloes and all the wild animals, and grand cities, with shops full of toys and dresses and beautiful things."

"Oh, it's the cities I'd like to be seein', with shops!" cried Moira. "We'll keep away from the hills and streams, Miss Winifred asthore, havin' them galore in our own country. An' we'll keep away from the forests, for fear it's the wild Indians we'd be comin' across."

Her tone was coaxing, with that wheedling note in it peculiar to her race.

"Oh, it's to the cities I must go!" said Winifred. "But I don't know what a city is like, Moira. I can't make a picture of it to my eye. It is a big place, crowded with people, all hurrying by in a stream; and the shops—"

"I seen a shop once!" exclaimed Moira. "There was things in the window. It was a thread-an'-needle shop, I think."

"There are all kinds in big cities," said Winifred; "and I can't make pictures of them either. But once I remember —I just seem to remember—a strange place. Perhaps it was the street of a city, with shining windows on either side. A gentleman had me by the hand; and presently he put me

before him on a horse and we galloped away, and I never saw those things again."

I heard these artless confidences of the young girl in the pauses of my own discourse with the blind woman, who heard them, too, and sometimes interrupted our talk with: "D'ye hear that now, ma'am?" or, "The Lord love her, poor innocent!"

But though I smiled and paused for an instant at such moments, I did not allow myself to be turned away from the main object of my visit, and at last I burst boldly into the subject which was occupying my mind.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

WHEN I mentioned the strange apparition which I had seen with Winifred on one of those mountain passes overlooking the Glen of the Dargle, I saw that Granny Meehan was troubled and that she strove to avoid the subject.

"Winifred seems very intelligent," I remarked.

"That she does," the old woman assented cordially. "Times there be when I'm afeard she knows too much."

"Too much?" I inquired.

Granny Meehan nodded as she added:

"Some says that it serves me right for lettin' her go to school so long to the mad schoolmaster."

Her voice sank almost to a whisper as she said the last words.

"The mad schoolmaster!" I repeated, feeling that here was no doubt the clue for which I had been so long seeking.

"Whist, ma'am dear! Don't speak that name so loud, —don't, for the love of God!" she interposed eagerly.

"Why, Mrs. Meehan," I said warmly, "you are too sensible and too religious a woman to believe all the nonsense that is talked hereabouts."

The old woman shook her head and hesitated a moment.

"I'm not sayin' that I believe this, that or the other thing," she declared, almost doggedly; "but at the end of life, ma'am dear, we get to know that there are people and things it's best not to meddle with."

"Was that the mad schoolmaster I saw with Winifred?" I asked—lowering my voice, however, in deference to the caution which I felt angrily disposed to call superstition.

"Sure I suppose 'twas himself and no other," declared Mrs. Meehan, with a half sigh. "Miss Winifred has a real heart-love for him; and sometimes it makes me uneasy, because people say he's too knowledgeable to have come honestly by his wisdom. There's no tellin'. But be that as it may, there's no other evil told of the man. He's been like a father to the poor little one and given her all the schoolin' she's had."

"He *is* a schoolmaster, then?" I asked.

"To be sure, ma'am, and a mighty fine one entirely; so that for many a year them that wanted their childer to have more book-learnin' than they have themselves, as folks do nowadays, sent their gossoons to him, and the girls as well. And a kind and good master he was, I'm told: never a cross word passin' his lips. And a fine scholar, with a power of learnin' in his head."

"Does he still keep the school?" I inquired further.

"He doesn't, ma'am, more's the pity. But 'twas this way. One began to be afeard of him, sayin' that he wasn't lucky; and another began to be afeard. The word flew from mouth to mouth, till but few enough remained. Then of a sudden he up and told the people that he wasn't goin' to teach no more in the hills of Wicklow; and he closed up his school and off with him for a month or so. He came back again, do you mind? But he never would have no pupils except Miss Winifred. And when the people seen that they tried to get him to take back the school. But it was all of no use: he's that set agin it that Father Owen himself could do nothin' with him."

"But how does he support himself?"

Granny Meehan turned her head this way and that, listening, to be sure that no one was about; then she leaned toward me, seeming to know by instinct where I sat, and began impressively:

"Oh, it's a queer kind of life he's led since then! He still has his cabin up in the Croghans—you may see it any day. Sometimes he's there and sometimes he isn't; but many a tale does be told about his doin's up yonder. There was one that watched him by night, and what do you think he seen?"

I could not imagine, and said so.

"He saw him puttin' stones into an iron pot, like this very one here that hangs on the hob for the potatoes."

I glanced at the utensil mentioned, while she went on with her tale.

"Well, with that the gossoon that was spyin' on him took to his heels and never stopped till he was safe at home; and, of course, the whole countryside knew of it by the mornin'. And, then, the schoolmaster goes wanderin' round in the night when honest folks are in their beds; and kneelin' down, they tell me, by the water side, as if he was prayin' to the moon and stars or to the fishes. Now I ask you if that's fit conduct for a Christian man?"

"He may have his own reasons for all that," I suggested. "Men of learning and science do many strange things."

"I'm afeard it's for no good he's actin' so," said Granny, in a cautious whisper. "Some will have it that he's worshippin' the devil; for how else could he get the gold and silver they say he has? He disappears now and again,—vanishes, as the story is, down into the ground or into some cave of the hills, and comes back with a power of money to

bury somewhere; for he never spends it honestly like other folks."

I pondered over the woman's narrative, vainly seeking for an explanation, and finally setting it down to the exaggeration of the simple country people. Parts of it tallied with my own observations; but, of course, I was prepared to accept any other solution of the mystery than that which was popularly given.

"The main thing," I said, "for you to consider is whether or no he is a suitable companion for Winifred. Whatever his pursuits may be, I believe he is of too unsettled and visionary a mind to have a good influence upon the child."

"Some do say, of course, that he's mad," reflected Mrs. Meehan; "and sure he goes by the name of 'the mad schoolmaster.'"

"Such may be the true state of the case," I said musingly; "and it would be all the more reason for preventing his constant association with Winifred."

"Mad he may be," observed Granny Meehan; "though you daren't say that much to Miss Winifred. She ever and always stands up for him. When the scholars were leavin' the school above, she spoke up for the schoolmaster, and didn't spare those that deserted him. So from that day to this he comes here every day of the week to teach her."

"He is still teaching her, then?" I inquired.

"To be sure, he is, ma'am! He tells her that she's never too old for the learnin'—not if she was the age of that old oak there before the door."

Granny Meehan fell into a deep and apparently painful reverie, out of which she roused herself to say, apprehensively lowering her voice to the utmost:

"And, ma'am, what makes me the most anxious of all is

the trinkets he do be givin' her. I'd never have known a word about it, but my hearin'—praise be to God for His goodness!—is mighty sharp, even though I haven't the sight of my eyes; and I heard some words he let fall, and next the sound of metal striking against metal, like the tinkle of a bell."

"And then?" I asked.

"Why, then I taxed Miss Winifred with what was goin' on, and she's as truthful as the day and wouldn't deny nothin'. So she up and told me of the beautiful trinkets of real gold he gave her. And I was vexed enough at it, and bid her throw them in the fire; fearin' mebbe they were fairy gold that would be meltin' away, leavin' ill luck behind."

"What did Winifred say to that?"

"She just fired up and bid me hold my peace, for a wicked old woman—she did indeed, ma'am."

And here Granny Meehan softly wiped away a tear.

"But I know she didn't mean it, the darlin'! And she was that soft and lovin' after that I could have forgiven her far more."

I remembered, while Granny spoke, the dainty, exquisitely wrought bracelet which I had seen displayed upon an oak leaf. But I preferred to keep that knowledge to myself and to hear all that the old woman had to tell. She presently added:

"Well, ma'am, when he comes the next day Winifred up and tells him what she did; and he flies into such a passion that I declare to you I was frightened nearly out of my wits. Such a-ragin' and a-stampin' as went on, for all the world like a storm roarin' through the castle on the wild nights. But Miss Winifred has that power over him that you'd think it was a fairy was in it, layin' spells over him. And she

scolded him for his bad temper, just as would myself; and stamped her foot at him. And the next thing I heard him askin' her pardon, quiet as a lamb."

"She's a strange child," I exclaimed.

"And why wouldn't she with the upbringin' she's had?" cried Granny Meehan. "But don't you think now, ma'am dear, that it's enough to make me heart ache with trouble to have the schoolmaster bringin' his trinkets here? How would he come honestly by such things? Not that I believe he steals them, ma'am—it isn't that."

She paused in her perplexity; adding quickly, in the awe-struck tone in which the simple people of the remote country districts speak of things which they suppose to be beyond mortal ken:

"Sure, then, ma'am, the only way he could come by them is through the old fellow himself, barrin' he gets them from the 'good people.'"

"But this Niall is a good man, is he not?"

"I never heard ill of him but that I'm tellin' you of," replied Granny Meehan. "Still, we're warned that the devil himself can take on the likeness of an angel of light; and if that's so, what's to hinder old Niall from bein' sold body and soul to the devil?"

"Well, I think we'd better give him the benefit of the doubt," I said. "If he appears to be a good man, let us believe that he is."

"Yes, mebbe you're right," observed Granny Meehan. "And the Lord forgive me for speakin' ill of my neighbors! But it's all out of my anxiety for Miss Winifred. The baubles may come not from the powers of darkness at all, but from the 'good people'; and that would be harmless enough, anyhow."

"In America we have no fairies—or good people, as you call them," I said jestingly.

"They tell me they're scarce enough in Ireland these days," Mrs. Meehan replied gravely. "It's only here among the hills we have them at all, at all."

"I am afraid I should have to see to believe," I said, laughing. "And now, Mrs. Meehan, in all our talk you have not told me who the schoolmaster is."

A deadly paleness overspread the old woman's face, and she sank back into the chair.

"The Lord between us and harm!" she muttered, "don't ask me that,—don't now, asthore!"

"But you know."

"Is it *I* know?" she cried. "Is it *I* would be pryin' into such things?"

I was more puzzled than ever. There was actual terror in Granny's tone.

"How absurd!" I said, partly vexed. "What mystery can there be which makes you afraid even to hint at it?"

She leaned toward me, her blind eyes rolling in their sockets, her thin lips quivering.

"A hint I'll give you," she said, "to keep you, mebbe, from talkin' foolishly and comin' to harm. He's of the old stock, I believe in my heart, come back to earth, or enchanted here, just to keep an eye on what's goin' on."

I laughed aloud. But she raised her hand in solemn warning.

"Don't for your life—don't make game of things of that sort!"

"Well, putting all that aside," I said, with some impatience, "what is the general opinion of the country people about this man?"

I asked this decisive question, though I had a pretty fair notion of what it might be from the fragmentary hints of my landlord.

"Well, it's good and it's bad," she replied, nodding her head impressively. "Truth to tell, there's so many stories goin' about the schoolmaster that it's hard to know the right from the wrong. There's them, as I was sayin', that declares he's mad, and there's more that'll tell you he's worse. And mind you, ma'am dear, none of them knows about the trinkets I was speakin' of, barrin' Miss Winifred and myself. For she put it on me not to tell; and of course I didn't till the blessed moment when I opened my heart to you, knowin' well that you'd never let a word of what I told you pass your lips."

"I shall keep the secret, of course," I promised; adding: "As to the man's character, the truth probably lies somewhere between the two opinions; but I still think him an unsuitable companion for Winifred, because he is likely to fill her head with all kinds of nonsense."

"It's God's truth you're tellin'," said the old woman. "But Miss Winifred's that fond of him there's no use in talkin' agin him."

There was a touch of bitterness in Granny Meehan's tone. It was evident that this attached nurse resented, in so far as it was in her gentle nature to resent, her young charge's partiality for the mysterious old man.

"And Miss Winifred," she continued, "sweet and all as she is, can be as wilful as the wind. She has known the old man all her life, and he tells her all the queer stories of the mountains and glens and rivers; and he acts toward her as if she were a grand, fine lady—and so she is, for the matter of that; for the child comes of a splendid old stock on both sides."

I sat listening to the old woman, and thought how the strange things she had told and the strange character we were discussing fitted in with the place in which it was being told: the massive stone walls, and the lozenged windows with their metal crossbars; the air of times long past which hung over everything; the blind woman, who might have been sitting there forever in the solitude of her blindness.

"Mebbe, ma'am," said Granny Meehan, breaking a silence which had fallen between us, "if you were to say a word to her—I can tell by the sound of her voice when she names you that she's taken a very great likin' to you—mebbe she'd listen."

"Well, if this Niall has so strong an influence over her as you say, believe me the word of a stranger would do no good. It might possibly do harm in prejudicing her strongly against me. It is better to win her confidence first, if I can. Meanwhile I shall keep my eye upon the schoolmaster and find out all I can concerning him. Of course I shall not be very long in the neighborhood, for I intend returning to America during the summer."

"America is a fine country, they tell me," said Granny Meehan, with a sigh. "And if I had my sight, mebbe it's there I'd be goin' some day, when—" she stopped abruptly, as if afraid to say too much; and then placidly continued: "Glory be to God for all His mercies! it wasn't to be. In His wisdom He seen that blindness was the best thing for me."

A smile, bright and soft as a summer sunset, lighted up her old face as she spoke; but even as I looked at her, with wonder and admiration at her faith, which was sublime in its simplicity, a black shadow fell suddenly upon the window-pane. I did not know what it was at first, and fancied that some great bird, which had built an eyrie in the ruined don-

jon, had swooped down to earth in the light of day. I soon perceived my mistake. It was the figure of the schoolmaster which had thus shut out the sunlight, and I imagined there was something menacing in its attitude.

CHAPTER VII.

THE OLD CASTLE.

In another instant the figure of the schoolmaster had vanished from the window; and Winifred entered, full of life and youthful spirits, recounting the details of her proposed ramble that evening with Moira and Barney, away to the bog for turf sods.

"Can't you leave it to themselves, Miss Winifred asthore?" said Granny. "Gatherin' peat is no work for you."

"What are these arms for?" cried Winifred, holding out a pair of strong young arms, which suggested health and strength in their every movement. "Am I not good for something as well as Barney and Moira?" Suddenly she changed her tone, running over and laying her soft young cheek against the wrinkled one of her nurse. "Think, Granny," she said, "what the bog will be like with the moon shining down upon it, making all sorts of ghostly shadows; so that after a while we shall just run for our lives; and Barney will whip up his roan horse and bring us home, shivering for fear of ghosts and fairies."

"Winifred," I observed, "you are far too fanciful for this nineteenth century. You will have to come away to America and get rid of all these unreal ideas."

Her face clouded at the mention of America, and she rose from her pretty attitude beside Mrs. Meehan, straight and tall as a willow.

"I told you I was going to America," she said coldly; "but I suppose people have fancies out there just as well as we have, only of a different kind."

There was a touch of shrewdness in this remark which amused me.

"Well, I suppose you're right," I said. "But such things should be fought against everywhere—or, at least, kept in their proper place."

"Fought against!" cried Winifred, with sudden warmth. "And what would the world be without fancies? Just as dull as the bog without the moon."

I felt that in a measure she was right, but I said nothing; and she presently added, in her ordinary tone:

"I think we had better go now to look at the castle. Another day I might not be able to show it to you."

I rose at once to accompany her; and then she added, with a half-petulant, half-playful air:

"I suppose you will only care to see the bare walls. And that won't be much; for it's the fancies that give them beauty."

"Forgive me, Winifred!" I said. "And show me the old walls with your own light upon them—clothed with the tapestry of your own fancy."

Her face brightened and she regarded me with a winsome smile, saying:

"Come, then, and I'll tell you everything; and you may think what you like and say what you like. I won't get cross any more. And if you talk about what you do in America, I will just say in my own mind: 'Oh, I suppose they have the bog without the moonlight out there; and if they are satisfied, it doesn't matter!'"

"She is indeed too old for her years," I thought; "but

so charming withal, who could help loving her? Her very wilfulness and what might seem like rudeness in another are redeemed by her voice and manner."

"What if I were to go in Barney's cart and see the bog by moonlight?" I ventured to suggest.

Winifred reflected.

"Barney would not object, I think," she decided. "But it may be best to ask him. He might feel abashed with you; and I know Moira would not speak a word, but just hold down her head and kick her heels together."

"In short, I should be a wet blanket," I went on.

"*I* should like to have you with us," Winifred said. "And, after all, the others might not mind much; so perhaps you had better come."

I laughed at the form of her invitation, but said that I would go.

"Very well," said Winifred; "that is settled. And here we are in the castle."

By this time we had passed through a long stone passage similar to that by which I had entered the room where we had left Granny Meehan; and from that time my interest grew and grew. Some parts of the castle were quite ruinous, so that we dared not enter, and only gazed in silence into gloomy, vault-like rooms, from which the floors were crumbling away. Here owls and bats held nightly revel; and Winifred told me, with bated breath, that there walked ladies of the olden time at midnight or knights with clanking armor. Again we came to halls into which streamed the light of heaven from ruinous roofs.

"We have games of hide-and-seek in some of these rooms," said Winifred, laughing. "Oh, you ought to see Moira and me tearing about here!"

We mounted at last to the donjon and looked down upon the moat, which was grass-grown; and upon the sally-ports in the walls and the battlements, time-stained and covered in places with ivy, the growth of centuries.

"They used to give battle in those days," said Winifred. "Wasn't it fine to mount the flag on this tower and say to invaders that you would die before you gave up the castle?" Her cheek glowed, and she tossed back the curls which were tumbling about her forehead. "And then the trumpets would be sounding down below, and the horses of the knights neighing, their lances shining, their banners waving. Oh, I wish I had lived at that time!"

Her words had called up a vivid picture from the past, and for a moment I stood and let my eyes wander out far over the hills. But Winifred called to me, and, taking my hand, led me down the winding stairs again. After that we went in and out of a succession of apartments, bewildering in their number and size; all bare, lofty, stone-walled and stone-paved. Here and there a faded tapestry still lingered, or a banner fluttered in the breeze which stole in through many a crack and cranny. At each pause which we made my guide was able to tell me some entrancing story, some bit of legendary lore which had all the charm of reality.

"If you know about the Red Branch Knights," said Winifred, "you must have heard of Cuchullin."

"He is the Lancelot of Irish romance," I assented.

"Well, I don't know anything about Lancelot," replied Winifred.

"It doesn't matter for the moment," I said. "Lancelot was a knight of great valor, always doing noble deeds."

"So was Cuchullin!" cried Winifred, eagerly. "Oh, I could tell you wonderful things he did, even as a boy!"

"Tell me one, at any rate," I pleaded.

"Well, I will tell you how he got his name," she began. "He went to the house of the smith who was giving a feast for the great King Conor (Conor was the boy's uncle). The smith had let out a great hound, for the King forgot to tell him that Cuchullin was coming. The boy came and gave battle to the hound and slew him. When the smith found out that his hound was dead he grieved very much, because the dog had tended his flocks and herds. The boy then offered to watch the cattle and guard them till a hound of equal strength could be found. And because of that he was called Cu-Culann, or the dog of the smith. He had to fight both dogs and men in defence of the cattle. But, then, he was a very brave boy; and, oh, it is a fine thing to have courage!"

"And to use it well as that boy did," I put in. "I suppose he grew up to be as good and brave a man."

"Yes, he was a very famous knight. He gained many victories and protected the poor and weak."

I smiled as I watched her fine, mobile face alight with the admiration she felt for that knight of the far-off past.

In the middle of a great room which we entered Winifred stopped abruptly; and when she spoke it was with awe in her voice.

"In this room," she observed, "was quartered for almost a whole winter the great Finn. Do you know who Finn was?"

"Perhaps he is the same as the Fingal of the Scotch," I replied.

"Perhaps so," said Winifred, indifferently; "but I don't know anything about Fingal. This Finn founded an order called the Fianna Eirrinn. He married Grania, 'the golden-haired, the fleet and young' daughter of King Connae, who lived on the Hill of Tara."

It was quaint to hear Winifred telling these legends or bits of ancient history in exactly the same language in which some older person had told them to her. I asked her to explain what kind of an order it was that this legendary hero had founded; and she told me it was a military order of knights who had sworn to defend the kingdom against foreign foes. She added that Finn possessed the gifts of poetry, of healing, and of second-sight—the latter from a fairy into whose palace he had succeeded in thrusting one hand.

"It is really wonderful how you can remember all these old stories!"

"Niall has been telling them to me ever since I was a little child," replied Winifred; "and I remember a great many more. In that hall downstairs which you see from this gallery, the harper sang to a great company about the mines in these hills and the golden treasures buried in the earth—"

She stopped abruptly, as if frightened, looking at me intently. But at the time her words conveyed very little to my mind except the poetic idea.

"In that same great hall down there," said Winifred, "used to be set up 'the caldron of hospitality.' Every one that came was fed. Princes, nobles, minstrels, servants, pilgrims, beggars—each had a place at the big tables which used to be there." She paused and looked down, as if she could see the brilliant scene before her. "In the middle of the room there," she cried, "the chief Conal was warned by the spirit who watches over the castle that he was to die that day. He was very strong and brave and beautiful, and he didn't fear death a bit. He went to meet it; and in a battle, beside King Brian, he was killed by a Dane."

We passed on, pausing at a great chamber, with windows ivy-hung, giving out upon that exquisite scenery which has

made famous the name of Wicklow. I looked out over the hills, whence a purple mist was lifting, leaving them illumined with a golden haze.

"I like the legend of St. Bridget," Winifred remarked.

"Tell it to me," I said.

"I suppose in America you believe in saints?" said Winifred, with such a look of drollery that I burst out laughing.

"All good Catholics do that," I said, "even if they are Americans."

"Of course this is a legend," Winifred went on; "and Father Owen—my dear Father Owen—told me that not all the legends told of the saints are true; but I think this one is."

"I should like to hear it," I repeated.

"Once St. Bridget was on a journey with some companions, and stopped to ask hospitality of the chief. He was away with his harper, for in old times every great person had a harper. But the chief's sons were at home, and they brought in their guests to the hall and spread out a banquet for them. While they were at table, St. Bridget looked up at the harps and asked the sons to give her some music. They replied: 'Alas! honored lady, our father is away with our harper, and neither my brother nor myself has skill in music. But if you will bless our fingers we will try to please you.' Bridget then touched their fingers with the tips of her own, and when the brothers sat down to the harps they played such music as was never heard. All at once the old chief came in and he stood spellbound at the exquisite music which his sons were bringing from the harp strings. He wondered very much, for they had never played before. But when he saw St. Bridget he understood it all."

"This old castle is full of beautiful legends," I observed.

"Yes," said Winifred. "Niall says he isn't sure that all

these things happened in this castle. He says, perhaps the minstrels or some one collected them from a good many castles and pretended that they all happened here. There are such a lot more I could tell you if there was time, but it is getting dark."

It was true; the dusk was creeping over the hills and down into the valleys, like some spirit of peace, causing all toil to cease and bidding all nature rest.

"If you will promise—oh, promise faithfully!—not to say a word to any one nor to ask too many questions, I will show you something," said Winifred suddenly.

"I suppose I must promise," I said.

And then she led me into a wing of the house which was in astonishingly good repair.

"The rooms here are all furnished," she remarked casually, "because people lived here once."

She did not say who and I did not ask. Finally she opened the door of a small room adjoining the kitchen in which Granny Meehan still sat solitary.

CHAPTER VIII.

WINIFRED'S TREASURES.

THE room into which Winifred led me was a model of neatness. The curtain upon the window, the cover upon the small bureau were of snowy-white; and the counterpane upon the bed was blue-and-white patchwork—a piece of art in its way.

"Granny did it all herself before she got blind," Winifred explained. "It was for my mother; but my mother never came here, and so I got it."

She handed me a chair as she spoke,—a high-backed, stiff wooden one, evidently of rustic manufacture; and, mounting upon another chair, she reached to the top of a rude wardrobe, or press, which stood in the corner. Thence she brought down a deal box, which she placed carefully on the floor, seating herself on a low stool beside it.

"I'll give you three guesses what is in there," she said, looking up at me with her bright smile.

"Your three guesses remind me of Portia's three caskets," I answered.

Winifred shook her head slowly. Evidently her knowledge did not extend to Shakespeare.

"Portia's caskets sound pretty," she remarked; "but I don't know what they are."

"I must tell you that pretty story some time. Her suitors were so many that she declared that only he who chose the

right casket should win her. Each suitor had to guess. The first of those caskets was gold—"

"Oh, you knew before!" interrupted the girl.

"Knew what?"

"I don't understand how you could have guessed so quickly."

"But I have guessed nothing," I said. "I only mentioned that the first casket was of gold."

"Oh, I thought you meant to tell me in that way that you knew what was in my box!" Winifred explained.

I stared and she suddenly withdrew the cover. My eyes were almost dazzled.

"There is gold in my box,—real pure gold," said the young girl.

And gold there was, amazing both in quality and quantity.

Winifred saw my astonishment, with innocent triumph.

"Look at that!" she said, detaching from the mass of shining metal a crown, which she held up for my inspection. While I looked she drew forth several other articles, all of peculiar make but of dainty and delicate design, some more richly wrought than others. There were collars, brooches, rings, bracelets,—thin bracelets, such as were worn in the olden days by kings and warriors.

"My dear," I said, "this is wonderful—like some Irish edition of the 'Arabian Nights.' I feel as if I had got into the cave of the Forty Thieves or some such place. Where on earth did those things come from?"

"I can't answer questions," Winifred said; "but I wanted you to see them, they are so beautiful and so very old. Occasionally I take them out to play with them."

"Costly playthings!" I murmured. "And since they are so old, how did they come to be so bright?"

Winifred grew red as she explained:

"Somebody polishes them with stuff to make them bright, but you mustn't ask who."

"But, my dear child, I ought to tell you that I know who has given you these things," I said gravely.

The flush faded from the girl's face, leaving it very pale.

"Ah, I must have betrayed his secret, then!" she cried. "He trusted me and I was false!"

"You have not done so intentionally. I was in the wood one day when you were given a bracelet—"

"Oh, that was the day you fell down! I thought you hadn't seen the bracelet, because you never spoke of it," Winifred said, in such real distress that I was only anxious to comfort her.

"You need not be afraid. Since you trust me so far as to show me these beautiful things, you may also believe that I shall keep the rest of the secret."

"That is different," observed Winifred. "He told me never to tell where I got these things; and now Granny Meehan found out, and you found out too."

"My dear," said I, "there is one thought which occurs to me, and which I must put in words. Bring your stool over and sit near me."

She did so, her dark curls almost resting on my lap.

"My thought is this. How does the person who gives you all these treasures procure them?"

She shook her head.

"You promised not to ask questions!" she exclaimed.

"Nor am I asking any which I expect you to answer," I said quietly. "But are you sure that these ornaments are honestly come by?"

Winifred sprang to her feet, her face crimson as upon

that day when I had made the blunder about Granny's sight.

"For shame!" she cried—"for shame! How could you think of such a thing? Niall, who is so good and who is giving his whole life for one purpose!"

I did feel unaccountably ashamed of myself.

"You must remember that I do not know Niall," I argued.

"Do you think evil of people without even knowing them?" Winifred cried impetuously. "If that's the way they do in America, I don't want to go there, and I won't go there."

"It is the way of the world, as you will find when you are older," I replied somewhat sharply; for I was vexed at being put in the wrong by this child. Having been treated with deference by all about her since her infancy, she knew little of the respect due to those who were older; and only such religious training as she had received from Father Owen, with an innate sense of propriety and a natural courtesy, prevented her from being that most objectionable of beings —a spoiled, selfish child.

I saw that Winifred was already ashamed of her vehemence, and I pointed to the stool at my feet.

"Sit down again, little one," I said, "and let me finish what I have to say; for I think it is my duty to speak out."

She obeyed in silence, and after a brief pause I went on:

"This is how it all appears to me, or would appear to any one of experience. The man Niall seems poor, leads a strange, solitary life, and yet he gives you articles of great value. There is, to say the least of it, a mystery as to how he procures them."

Winifred said not a word, but sat still with downcast eyes.

"And, since I am upon the subject," I added, "I may as

well tell you that he is not, in my opinion, a suitable companion for you."

"Not a suitable companion!" the girl repeated, raising her eyes to my face in astonishment. "Niall, who has taught me nearly everything I know! Why, if it had not been for him I should have been as ignorant as Moira. I love him as if he were my father."

"He has taught you a great deal that is wild and visionary," I argued. "You know nothing of the realities of life. You are content to lead this wandering, aimless existence, when life has real duties, and, as you must find, real cares and sorrows."

This reproach seemed to touch her; for, with one of those strange flashes of intuition, she seemed at once to catch my meaning.

"But how can Niall help that?" she cried. "He has been very kind to me. He told Granny to teach me my prayers, and took me to Father Owen himself, so that I could go to confession and make my first communion; and he spends his whole life working for me. What should I do without him? I have no one else except dear old Granny, and she is blind."

There was something so pathetic in the way all this was said that, almost involuntarily, the tears came into my eyes. I began to realize that the man had done and was doing his best for the child, but his best was not sufficient; and, sitting there beside that heap of now disregarded treasures, I formed the resolve, in spite of all difficulties, to take the child with me to America. She might return later to be the guardian spirit of this old house and to repay Niall and good Granny Meehan for the devotedness with which they had watched over her childhood. But she must first acquire that

knowledge of the world, the real world of her own day, in which she was now so deficient.

There was little reason to doubt from her appearance that she was indeed, as Granny Meehan had said, of a fine old stock. Therefore she must be educated as a lady. I should try, if possible, to solve the mystery concerning her parents; and then I should take her with me to the great country beyond the seas, where the wildest dreams are occasionally realized; and where, at least, there is opportunity for all things. I knew, however, that this would mean diplomacy. If I were to broach the subject to her just then, she would probably refuse to come. I must first win her; and I must gain the confidence of Niall, if that were at all possible. He would understand far better than this child of nature the advantages of a journey to the New World and of a good education there.

"I wish you knew Niall!" Winifred said, with a suddenness which startled me,—it was so like the echo of my own thoughts.

"I wish so too!" I replied fervently.

"But it is very hard. He does not like strangers; and he seems to dislike people from America most of all."

"That is very unfortunate!" I said, laughing.

"Yes," assented Winifred. "Still, he might like some of them very well—if he knew them."

She said this with the utmost simplicity. I did not tell her that I was going to seek Niall's acquaintance; for I feared she might warn him and he might disappear, as was his wont from time to time, or take other means of preventing me from carrying out my purpose. I told her, instead, that I must be going; that I had had a most delightful day and was charmed with her castle and her legends.

"How grand it must have been when it was a real castle," she said; "and when there was an abbey near by, with a church, and the monks singing! It was one of the race who founded that abbey, in thanksgiving for having been saved from great danger."

"Ah, those were the days of faith!" I exclaimed. "And whatever evil the people did they repaired it nobly by penance and by the great monuments they built up."

As we turned to leave the room I asked Winifred:

"Are you going to leave all these valuable things here?"

"Why, of course!" she answered in surprise.

"Can't you ever lock them up?"

Winifred burst out laughing.

"Lock them up!" she said. "Why should I do that?"

"To save them from being stolen."

"As if anything was ever stolen here! I can assure you there isn't a robber in the whole countryside."

"Why, that is as wonderful as your treasures!" I exclaimed, as we went in to where Granny Meehan sat, as usual, placidly by the fire, a great cat purring and rubbing its furry sides against her gown. The animal fixed on me that glance of grave scrutiny with which these feline creatures appear to read one's whole history, past, present and to come; after which she arched her back and lay down near the hearth.

Winifred walked down with me a piece of the way, after I had said farewell to Granny Meehan, who had heard my glowing praises of the castle with flushed cheeks, down which stole a tear or two of pride. When we were parting, Winifred remarked wistfully:

"I think, perhaps, Niall and I are different from any other people. But it's no use trying to change us: we shall always be the same."

CHAPTER IX.

A MOONLIGHT EXPEDITION.

It was a lovely night when I set out with the merrymakers to the bog in search of peat. Barney was full of drollery, a typical Irish lad such as I had not seen in Wicklow before; and Moira, though at first fulfilling Winifred's predictions by sitting silently with her heels kicking together where they hung out of the cart, and her head hanging down, after a while awoke to the spirit of fun and frolic that was abroad.

"Ah, then, Danny avick, will you move on!" cried Barney to the horse. "Is it standin' still you'd be, you Tory, and Miss Winifred in the cart and the strange lady from America?"

The horse seemed moved by this adjuration, as well as by a touch of the whip, and trotted along the shining, silent road.

"I should enjoy a run with Moira on this road!" said Winifred.

"Get down, then, and have your run," I answered. "Barney and I will easily keep you in sight."

"You will not mind if I leave you for a little while?" asked Winifred.

"No, indeed, dear. Barney and I will entertain each other."

Barney pulled up the horse.

"Be still, you spalpeen," he cried, "and let Miss Winifred down!"

The horse, nothing loath, stood still.

Winifred leaped lightly to the ground, followed more clumsily by Moira.

"Ah, then, Moira," exclaimed her brother, "will you be all night gettin' out of the cart?"

Moira made no answer. Her red cheeks were aglow with delight at the prospect of escaping for a time from my embarrassing company and having a run along the grass-bordered road.

Winifred stopped a moment or two to pet the horse.

"Poor Danny!" she said. "Barney is always calling you names. But you don't mind; do you, Danny?"

The horse seemed to answer that he did not in the least, rubbing his nose against the child's arm in a gratified way. Then Winifred gave the word, and together the two girls were off, their happy voices coming back to us as we drove leisurely along in the soft, balmy air. They stopped now and again to pick flowers from the hedge or to seek out daisies and wild violets in the fresh grass; while Barney kept up a series of droll remarks,—sometimes addressed to the horse, sometimes to me.

"I hear you're thinking of taking a trip to America, Barney," I remarked.

"True for you, ma'am—between now and Doomsday. I'm afeard it will be that long before I get the passage money together."

"Why should you be so anxious to leave this beautiful country?" I said.

"Why?" exclaimed Barney, casting a shrewd glance at me. "Oh, then, sure it's meself that's had enough of beauty without profit. I want to go where I'll get paid for my work, and be able to hold up my head with a dacent hat upon it."

As he spoke he took off and surveyed his own head-covering, which was of the kind described but too accurately as a caubeen. I could not help laughing at the gleam of humor which shot out of his eyes—good eyes they were, too.

"Oh, you villain of the world, is it straight into the hedge you want to drive the lady from America? What'll she be thinkin' of you at all for an unmannerly beast?"

The animal, being unable to answer these reproaches, shook out his mane again, and resumed his jog-trot till he came up with the two girls, who, out of breath from their exertions, were glad to jump into the cart. And so we drove on till we came at last to the bog. It was a strange, wild scene, with the moon shining over it in broad patches of silver, showing the green turf here and the black ground there, with mounds of earth arising ghost-like, and clamps of turf left drying for use, and the clusters of trees, fragments of old-time forests.

We all got down from the cart, whence Barney produced a slane, or turf-spade. He wanted to cut and leave to dry a bernum of sods, and so set to work without delay. He cut around till the sods were of sufficient depth; then he dug them up, and, turning them over, he left them to dry. He explained to me that they had afterward to be "footed"—that is, made into parcels,—and then put into rickles, which are turf-sods piled upon each other to a certain height; and lastly into clamps, which are tall stacks.

Moira took a turn at the spade, her face growing redder with the exertion. Winifred ran over to her.

"Let me have a turn," she said; "you know I like to dig."

And dig Winifred did, in spite of the protestations of Barney and Moira. The former said to me:

"Och, then, you might as well try to stop the wind from whistlin' through the trees beyant as to stop Miss Winifred when she's set on anything!"

He watched her with a comical look as the girl dug the slane into the earth, cutting with great precision and actually raising two or three sods.

"D'ye see that now?" cried the rustic, with a mingling of admiration and amusement.

"Oh, but you're the wonder of the world, Miss Winifred asthore!" cried Moira. "When it was all I could do to raise the sod meself!"

All three then busied themselves in removing some of the dry turf from the clamp which Barney had previously erected, and in stowing it away in the cart. This done, Winifred said to me:

"Come; and you too, Moira and Barney! There's a fairy ring here and we'll dance about it in the moonlight."

"The blessin' of God between us and harm!" cried the alarmed boy and girl in a breath. "Is it dancin' in a fairy ring you'd be doin'?"

"Yes, there and nowhere else!" she said imperiously. "Come!—the lady and I are waiting for you."

Seeing their reluctance, I had gone forward at once, to show them that a fairy ring was no more to me than a patch of earth where the grass was softer and greener, and which was now whitened by the moon. And dance we did. Though Barney and Moira were afraid of the fairies, they were still more afraid of displeasing Winifred. I stopped at last, holding my sides with merriment and begging of Winifred to let me rest. She threw herself, in a very spirit of mischief, on top of a mound. This proceeding evoked exclamations of horror from Moira and Barney.

"To lie upon a rath!" groaned Moira. "It's bewitched you'll be and turnin' into something' before our eyes."

"Or spirited away underground!" added Barney; "or laid under a spell that you'd ever and always be a child."

"I'd like that," remarked Winifred, settling herself more comfortably upon the mound. "I don't want to grow up or be old ever."

She gazed up at the moon, seeming to see in its far-shining kingdom some country of perpetual youth.

"She'd like it! The Lord save us!" cried Barney. "It's wishin' for a fairy spell she is. Come away, Miss Winifred dear,—come away, if you're a Christian at all, and not a fairy as some says."

Moira uttered an exclamation, and, darting over to Barney, dealt him a sounding slap on the ear.

"How dare you talk that way to Miss Winifred!" she cried.

"And how dare you slap Barney for repeating what foolish people say!" broke in Winifred. "I'm ashamed of you, Moira!"

She stood up as she spoke, confronting both the culprits. Barney's face was still red from the slap, as well as from a sense of the enormity he had committed in repeating to Miss Winifred what he supposed had been kept carefully from her. Moira's lip quivered at her young mistress's reproof, and she seemed on the point of crying; but Winifred spoke with exceeding gentleness.

"I'm sorry I was so hasty," she said; "but, you see, Barney spoke only for my good, and you should have had patience with him."

"And I ask your pardon for the words I said," Barney began, in confusion.

"You needn't, Barney," said Winifred. "You only told me what you hear every day." Then, turning to me, she added: "So you won't be surprised when I do anything strange. For, you see, I'm only a fairy, after all; and a mischievous one at times." Her face was all sparkling with smiles, and the very spirit of mischief looked out of her eyes. "I'll be laying spells on you to keep you here."

"I may be weaving a counter one to take you away," I ventured.

She looked a little startled, but went on in the same playful tone, as she turned back again to the bewildered boy and girl:

"I'll be enchanting the pair of you, so that you will be standing stock-still just where you are for a hundred years, staring before you."

At this they both took to their heels with a scream, Winifred in pursuit.

"And I'll turn Danny into a dragon and send him flying home with the turf."

There were muffled exclamations of terror from the flying pair.

"I think I'll make you into a goose, Barney, with a long neck, thrusting yourself into everybody's business; and Moira into a pool where you can swim."

"Och, och! but the child is temptin' Providence!" cried Moira, coming to a stand at some distance off. "Here in this place of all others; and close by the rath where the gentlefolks is listenin' to every word, and she makin' game of them to their faces!"

"Mebbe she *is* a fairy, after all!" muttered Barney, under his breath; for he feared a repetition of Moira's prompt chastisement. But this time indeed he was beyond the reach of

her arm, and Moira herself was in a less warlike mood. A sudden shadow, too, fell over the moon, so that we were in darkness. It was a cloud of intense blackness, which fell like a pall on the shining disc.

"See what comes of meddlin' with them you know!" cried Barney, while even Winifred was sobered; and the three crept toward the cart, Barney and Moira shivering with fright. Barney whipped up the unconscious horse, who had much relished his stay upon the bog, and was only urged into activity by the prospect of going home.

"Go now, then, Danny avick!" Barney whispered. "It's not bein' turned into a quare beast of some kind you'd wish to be. Get us away from here before the good people comes up out of the rath; for there's no tellin' what they'd do to us."

"Hear how he talks to the horse!" said Winifred, who was now seated again beside me, her curls dancing with the jolting of the cart. "As if Danny knew anything about the good people!"

"Oh, doesn't he, then, Miss Winifred!" cried Barney. "It's meself has seen him all of atremble from me whisperin' in his ear concernin' them."

"You just imagine it, Barney," said Winifred.

"And is it *I* imagine it?" exclaimed Barney, aggrieved; while Moira sat in terrified silence, peering from side to side into the darkness as if she expected to see the avenging good people waiting for us along the road. We were nearly at the castle gate before Barney resumed anything of his former spirits and ventured on a joke or two. But Winifred was the merriest of the merry, and kept me laughing immoderately all along the moonlit way, as we jolted and jogged. She insisted that the cart wheels sang a song, and made up rhymes

to the musical sounds which she pretended she could hear so plainly.

I often look back to that evening with peculiar pleasure. Winifred was at her best: most childlike, most natural, thoroughly enjoying every moment of the beautiful summer night; so that the doubt came over me whether it was better, after all, to remove her from this idyllic life amongst the Irish hills. The sober common-sense, however, of next morning confirmed me in my previous opinion, and I took the first step toward the realization of that design by seeking an interview with the schoolmaster.

CHAPTER X.

A VISIT TO THE SCHOOLMASTER.

I SET out, with Barney as my guide; but Barney had stoutly declared that he would go only a part of the way, as he did not want to trust himself anywhere in the neighborhood of the schoolhouse.

"Sure I went to school there for the length of a whole winter," he said; "and the master drove the larnin' into my head. He was a kind man, except when the anger rose on him. But I was afeard of him, and at long last I ran away and hid, and wouldn't go next or nigh him any more."

"You were very foolish," I remarked. "He could have given you an education and prepared you to go to America, if such is your intention."

But Barney was not to be moved in his opinion, and went on beside me in dogged silence till we came to a turn in the road, where he left me, refusing to go a step further.

"You can't miss the road now, ma'am," he declared. "Just push along the way you're goin' till you come to the next turn, and then you'll have the schoolhouse foreninst you."

I thanked him and walked on in the path directed, the cool mountain air fanning my cheeks, which were heated by the walk. It was an enchanting scene, and I stopped more than once before reaching that turn in the road described by Barney. There, sheltered to some extent by an overhanging crag, stood the cabin of the "mad schoolmaster," in one of

the loveliest, as it was one of the wildest, spots in all that beautiful region.

I hesitated but an instant; then, stepping forward, knocked at the door. I opened it, after I had knocked several times without receiving any answer, and entered the cheerless schoolroom. It was quite undisturbed, as though this remarkable man still expected scholars. The rude seats were there, the cracked slates, the table which had served as the master's desk; a map or two still hung upon the wall. A heap of ashes was on the hearth; above it, hanging from a hook, the identical iron pot in which Niall, it was said, had been seen to boil the stones. There was something weird in the scene, and I felt a chill creeping over me. It required all my common-sense to throw off the impression that the rustic opinion of the occupant of the cottage might be, after all, correct.

As I looked around me and waited, the blue sky without became suddenly overclouded. I stepped to the window. A glorious sight met my eyes, but I knew that it meant nothing less than a mountain storm; and here was I in such a place, at a considerable distance from home. Mass after mass of inky-black clouds swept over the mountain, driven by the wind, obscuring the pale blue and gold which had been so lately predominant. The wind, too, began to rise, blowing in gusts which swept over and around the cabin, but mercifully left it unharmed, because of the protection afforded by the high rock. But it rattled the windows and whistled and blew, and finally brought the rain down in a fearful torrent. Flashes of lightning leaped from crag to crag, uniting them by one vast chain. Each was followed by a roar of thunder, re-echoed through the hills.

It was an awful scene, and I trembled with an unknown fear, especially when I felt rather than saw that some one

was close behind me. I turned slowly with that fascination which one feels to behold a dreaded object; and there, quite near me indeed, stood the schoolmaster. I suppose his coming must have been unnoticed in the roar of the tempest. I could not otherwise account for his presence. The strange cloak, or outer garment, which he wore seemed perfectly dry; and I wondered how he could have come in from such rain apparently without getting wet. The smile upon his lips was certainly a mocking one; and as I faced him thus I felt afraid with the same cold, sickly fear. His eyes had in them a gleam which I did not like—of cunning, almost of ferocity.

"You have come," he said, without any previous salutation, "to pry into a mystery; and I tell you you shall not do it. Rather than that you should succeed in the attempt I would hide you away in one of those hills, from which you should never escape."

I strove to speak, but my tongue clove to the roof of my mouth; and I could only gaze into those strange, gleaming eyes of his, from which I was afraid to remove my own.

"You have come from America," he said; "perhaps it is to get *her*. And that you shall never do till my plans are completed."

"To get whom?" I faltered out.

"*Whom?*" he thundered in a terrible voice, which set me trembling more than ever. "You know whom. You are trying to win Winifred from me—the child of my heart, beautiful as the mountain stream, and wayward as the breeze that stirs its surface."

His face changed and softened and his very voice sunk to one of peculiar sweetness as he spoke of the child. But in an instant again he had resumed his former wildness and harshness of tone and demeanor.

"You are trying to win the child from me," he went on; "to destroy my influence over her, to upset my plans. But you shall not do it—I say you shall not do it!"

He glared into my face as he spoke, with an expression which only too closely resembled that of a wild beast. Words rose to my lips. I hardly knew what I said.

"But are you not a Christian—you are a God-fearing man?"

It was a strange question, and he answered it with a sneer fearful to see.

"God-fearing? I used to be so when I knelt, a gossoon, at my mother's knee; and when, a stripling, I led the village choir. But so I am not now. I have only one god, and that is gold."

He brought out the words with a fearful power, as though he hurled them against something. His voice actually rose above the storm, and he threw back his head as though in defiance of the very heavens.

I shuddered, but I spoke with more courage than I had hitherto done.

"If all that is true," I said, "surely you will see yourself that you are no companion for Winifred."

"No companion for my little lady?" he repeated in surprise, with that same softening of his face and tone I had before remarked. "There you are wrong. I guard her as the rock guards the little flower which grows in its crevice, as the gardener guards a cherished plant, as the miner guards his rarest gem. I teach her to pray, to kneel in church down yonder, to believe, to hope, to love; because all that is her shield and safeguard against the great false world into which she will have to go. Why, Father Owen himself has scarce done more for her on the score of religion. I tell her tales

of the saints and holy people who sleep in the soil of Ireland; but all the while I am a sinner—a black sinner—with but one god, whom I worship with all my might, and for whom I slave day and night."

"You can not be what you say if you have done all that for Winifred," I ventured.

"I am what I say!" he cried, turning on me with a snarl. "And so you shall find if you attempt to meddle with me; for I have a secret, and if you were to discover that—" he paused—"I believe I would kill you!"

My fear was growing every instant, till I felt that I must faint away with the force of it; but I stammered out:

"I don't want to meddle with you or to discover your secret; I want to find out if you are a safe companion for Winifred, and if you will help me in a plan I have in view."

"A plan?" he said wildly. "I knew it was so. A plan to take Winifred away, to undo all my work, to thwart the plans which I have had in my mind for years! Beware how you make the attempt—beware, I tell you!"

A sudden inspiration, perhaps from above, came to me, and I said as steadily as possible:

"It would be far better than making all these idle threats to confide in me and tell me as much or as little of your plans as you please. I am a stranger; I have no object in interfering in the affair, except that I am deeply interested in Winifred, and would do anything possible for her good. You love the little girl too, so there is common ground on which to work."

"God knows I do love her!" he cried fervently. "And if I could only believe what you say!"

He looked at me doubtfully—a long, searching look.

"You may believe it," I said, gaining confidence from

his changed manner. Still, his eyes from under their shaggy brows peered into my face as he asked:

"You never read, perhaps, of the Lagenian mines?"—with a look of cunning crossing his face.

"In the lines of the poet only," I replied, surprised at the sudden change of subject and at the question.

Niall looked at me long and steadily, and my fear of him began to grow less. He had the voice and speech of an educated man—not educated in the sense which was common enough with country schoolmasters in Ireland, who sometimes combined a really wonderful knowledge with rustic simplicity. And he had scarcely a trace of the accent of the country.

"What if I were to take a desperate chance," he said suddenly, "and tell you all, all? I have whispered it to the stars, the hills, the running waters, but never before to human ears except those of my little lady. If you are true and honest, God deal with you accordingly. If you are not, I shall be the instrument of your punishment. I call the thunders to witness that I shall punish you if I have to walk the world over to do so; if I have to follow you by mountain and moor, over the sea and across whole continents."

A terrific flash of lightning almost blinded us as he took this tremendous oath, which terrified me almost as much as though I were really planning the treachery he feared. I covered my eyes with my hands, while crash upon crash of thunder that followed nearly deafened us. Niall sat tranquil and unmoved.

"I love the voice of the storm," he murmured presently. "It is Nature at its grandest—Nature's God commanding, threatening."

When the last echo of the thunder died away he turned back again to the subject of our discourse.

"If I should trust you with my secret," he began again, with that same strange, wild manner which led me to believe that his mind was more or less unhinged, "you will have to swear in presence of the great Jehovah, the God of the thunder, the God of vengeance, that you will not betray it."

"I can not swear," I said firmly; "but I will promise solemnly to keep your secret, if you can assure me that there is nothing in it which would injure any one, or which I should be bound in conscience to declare."

"Oh, you have a conscience!" cried this singular being, with his evil sneer. "Well, so much the better for our bargain, especially if it is a working conscience."

"And you have a conscience too," I declared, almost sternly; "though you may seek to deaden it—that Catholic conscience which is always sure to awaken sooner or later."

He laughed.

"I suppose I have it about me somewhere, and there will be enough of it any way to make me keep an oath." He said this meaningly; adding: "So, before I begin my tale, weigh all the chances. If you are a traitor, go away now: leave Wicklow, leave Ireland, and no harm is done. But stay, work out your treachery, and you shall die by my hand!"

I shuddered, but answered bravely:

"You need fear no treachery on my part—I promise that."

"Then swear," he cried,—"swear!"

"I will not swear," I said; "but I will promise."

"Come out with me," he roared in that voice of his, so terrible when once roused to anger, "and promise in the face of heaven, with the eye of God looking down upon you."

He seemed to tower above me like some great giant, some Titan of the hills; his face dark with resolve, his eyes gleaming, his long hair streaming from under the sugar-loaf hat

down about his shoulders. He seized me by the arm and hurried me to the door.

Hardly knowing what I did, I repeated after him some formula—a promise binding, certainly, as any oath. As I did so, by one of those rare coincidences, the sun burst out over the hills, flooding all the valleys and resting lovingly upon the highest mountain peaks.

"The smile of God is with us," Niall said, his own face transformed by a smile which softened it as the sunshine did the rocks. "And now I shall trust you; and if you be good and true, why, then, we shall work together for the dear little lady, and perhaps you will help me to carry out my plans."

CHAPTER XI.

THE SCHOOLMASTER'S TALE.

"You must know," Niall began, "that Winifred is a descendant of the proud race which inhabited the castle wherein the child now lives. You are not, I am sure, acquainted with the history of her ancestors, nor shall I tell it. But for a thousand years they have been foremost in war, in minstrelsy, in beauty, in hospitality, in benefactions to the Church and in charity to the poor. Winifred is of that race and—" he paused and drew himself up with some pride—"and so am I."

Suddenly I uttered an exclamation of astonishment.

"I am the uncle of her father. This part of the story she has not learned; but she does know that for years it has been the dream of my life to restore the old castle, to bring back the fallen glories of our race. I, being a younger brother, was debarred from the line of succession. That fact early stirred me into bitterness; the more so as my elder brother, Winifred's grandfather, was of an easy and pleasure-loving temperament. Far from doing anything to improve matters, he seemed to let everything go. I gradually withdrew from all intercourse with my fellow men. I dwelt alone, in a secluded part of the castle, and gave myself up to study. I desired to master the secrets of the universe, and in the course of my studies I learned one thing."

He stopped and looked at me fixedly.

"And that is the secret which I have striven so hard to keep and which I am about to confide to you. But let that

pass for the present. My brother had an only son, and he was a son after my own heart. He seemed to combine in himself all the best qualities of our race. He was daring, generous, impulsive, yet steadfast and enduring. Gifted with great personal beauty, he had rare talents and a most winning manner. On him I built my hopes. He would in some way gain wealth, honor, renown. I thought I had already the key to the first, but I wanted him to win the others by his own efforts. I goaded him into action; I disgusted him with the life of a country gentleman which his father had led—and a poor and obscure one at that."

Niall sighed deeply as he resumed:

"Sometimes, after an interview with me, he would mount his white horse and gallop over the country, to control the agitation which my words had awakened in him. He went away at last to Dublin seeking fame. Every now and then he returned to tell me of his pursuits, and I urged him on more and more. Suddenly his interest began to slacken, and I saw that it had taken another direction. Next thing I heard he was married. His wife was a mere fine lady, though of a worthy stock. But I parted from Roderick in anger. We had a bitter quarrel. In his anger he called the old castle a ruin, laughed at my plans for restoring it, and declared he would never bring his wife there nor permit her to see its ruinous state. After that he went away."

It seemed as if Niall's emotion would at this point prevent him from continuing the story; but he controlled himself by an effort and went on.

"Roderick returned only once, dressed in deep mourning, and bringing with him a child about five years old. That was Winifred. He left her in care of Mrs. Meehan. He promised to come back some day or send for his daughter,

but he gave no clue as to his own subsequent movements. I myself believe he went to America. Since then I have seen in the child the hope of our race. She has taken her father's place in my heart."

"But how came she to be ignorant that you were her father's uncle? Surely the neighbors, especially Mrs. Meehan, must have known."

"The neighbors knew nothing. I had lived, as I told you, in retirement, and had been absent, spending many years in the Far East. I had ceased to attend church once youth had passed, and was never seen in public. I vanished out of the memory of all save a few old servants, who dropped off one by one. Mrs. Meehan may suspect something of the truth, but she knows nothing for a certainty."

I smiled, remembering the dark hints the blind woman had thrown out.

"But how, then," I asked, "did you come to be known—"

"As the schoolmaster?" he put in. "I abandoned the castle for purposes of my own. I went to live in this cabin in the hills, and I took pupils—partly to divert attention from my real pursuits, partly to enable me to live."

I waited silently for the conclusion of the strange narrative; but he had fallen into profound thought, and sat staring at the floor, seeming to have forgotten my presence. At last he went on:

"Winifred, as I have said, was regarded by me as the hope of our race. Without revealing to her our relationship, I treated her with the deepest respect, in order to give her some idea of the importance of her position as heiress of an ancient house, which, though obscured for a time, is destined one day to be restored."

As the old man spoke thus, something of his former

excitement returned, and he stood up, pacing the room, his eyes glowing and his features working convulsively. Now, nothing in the whole affair had more surprised me than the manner in which Niall had passed from a state of almost insane fury into the quiet courtesy of a well-bred man; so I waited till his excitement had once more subsided. Then he sat down again upon the three-cornered stool whence he had arisen, and continued:

"If Roderick be still living, I shall find him one day and restore his child to him. But it must be through me that this restoration is effected; and I must at the same time offer him the means of repairing the old castle and taking up again the life of a country gentleman."

"Have you any reason to think he is living?" I asked.

"Oh, I do not know!" Niall answered mournfully. "For many years he sent remittances and inquired for the child, saying that he would one day claim her. Lately both money and letters have ceased. A rumor reached me—I scarcely know how—that Roderick had married a second wife. Even if that be true, he must have changed indeed if he can forget his own child. I am haunted forever by the fear that he may, after all, be dead; or that, living, he might one day claim Winifred and take her away from Ireland forever. And that I will never permit."

I was half afraid of another outbreak; but it did not come. He went on, in a calm and composed tone of voice:

"I must confess that when I heard you were here—"

"You fancied, perhaps, that I was the second wife?" I said, smiling.

"What I fancied matters little!" he cried, almost brusquely. "But I made up my mind that if you had come here on such a mission, you should return disappointed."

"Now, I may as well admit," I said deliberately, "that I have had thoughts of carrying Winifred away."

He started.

"Not as the result of a preconcerted plan," I hastened to add; "for I never heard of Winifred nor of the castle till I came here, and I could not even now tell you the name of her father. I have heard him spoken of merely as Roderick."

"Roderick O'Byrne," said Niall, fixing his keen eyes upon my face.

It was my turn to start and to color violently, with the sudden recollection.

"So you do, perhaps, know Mr. Roderick O'Byrne, after all?" said the schoolmaster, dryly; and I saw that his former suspicions were revived.

"Know him? Why, yes. But as the father of Winifred —no."

"And where, may I ask, have you met him?"

"In New York city."

He bent eagerly forward.

"Tell me—oh, tell me how long ago was that?"

"Within the last six months."

"Then he is still alive?"

"He was when I sailed from New York," I assented.

Tears which he could not repress forced themselves from the old man's eyes and flowed down his cheeks. They were tears of joy and relief.

"O Roderick!" he murmured; "dear Roderick, son of my heart, you are upon the green earth still, and I feared you had left it for evermore!"

"Moreover," I went on, "you are altogether wrong in supposing he is married again."

"What's that you say?" he cried joyfully. "Living and still a widower?"

"Living and still a widower."

"You are sure of that?"

"Quite sure."

Niall muttered some exclamation in Irish, the meaning of which I did not know; then he turned upon me with a beaming smile.

"You are as the dawn that heralds a bright day, as the sun that peeps from out a dark cloud, as a flower thrusting its head through the snow!"

I sat watching the schoolmaster with real gratification at the pleasure I had given him. Then he asked:

"He never spoke to you of Winifred?"

"Never."

"Nor of Wicklow?"

"Nor of Wicklow."

"He has forgotten Ireland!" cried the old man bitterly. "He has become Americanized, as they all do."

"On the contrary," I observed. "I heard him speak once of Ireland, and in a way I shall never forget."

He looked at me with sudden keenness, even suspicion; and I smiled.

"I know what you are smiling at!" Niall cried, with one of those quick flashes of intelligence which reminded me of Winifred.

"Do you?" I said, laughing outright. "Well, then, I may as well tell you I was smiling at the suspicion I saw in your eyes—smiling at the contrast between my gray hairs and wrinkles and Roderick O'Byrne as I saw him last."

"Yet Roderick is no boy," argued Niall. "Roderick is close to forty."

"He has the secret of perpetual youth," I said, warming at the remembrance. "Winifred has it too; she will never grow old. But now my heart is more than ever in your plans, and I should like to possess your entire confidence,—to know, for instance, how the wealth is to be obtained with which to restore the ancient castle."

"That," said Niall, impressively, "is the secret which hitherto I have shared with no one save Winifred, and which I am about to impart to you. But remember your promise is as solemn, as binding as an oath."

"I remember," I said; "and I tell you once more that no word of your secret shall ever be repeated by me to any one without your express permission. Take my word for it."

Niall stood up and looked all about him, examined the door and the window, went outside and walked around the cabin, tried the chinks in the walls; and when he was quite convinced that no living thing was in the vicinity, he drew a stool near, and, laying his sugar-loaf hat upon the floor, began to pour into my ears a tale which seemed almost magical. His appearance changed, too, as he went on with his narrative. His eyes, alight with enthusiasm, presently took on an expression merely of greed. The craving for gold was written on every line of his face. It was so plain a lesson against avarice that involuntarily I shuddered.

He tossed his hair from his forehead, while his features worked convulsively; and it was only when he left that part of the subject which related to mere gold, and rose once more to the plan he had in view of restoring the old castle, that he brightened up again. Then I saw in him one of those mysterious resemblances which run through a race: a likeness to Roderick—gay, handsome, and comparatively young; a likeness to Winifred herself.

I had a curious feeling of unreality as I sat there and listened. The old man might be Roderick O'Byrne himself after the passage of a score or more of years; the cabin might be an enchanted spot, which would vanish away at touch of a wizard's wand; and these rude chairs and tables might be condemned by the same strange witchery to remain forever inanimate. I had to shake myself to get rid of this feeling which crept over me, and seemed to overpower the sober common-sense, the practical and prosaic wisdom, which seem to spring from the American soil.

CHAPTER XII.

THE SCHOOLMASTER'S SECRET.

I HAD waited with breathless interest for what Niall might have to say; but he put his whole secret in the opening words of his narrative.

"I am," he began, "a gold-seeker—a hunter for treasure-trove."

"A gold-seeker?" I repeated, amazed and incredulous; though here was the explanation of many mysteries.

"Yes. Here, in these very mountains gold has been found time and time again. There were mines here scarce a hundred years ago; 'tis said that ten thousand pounds' worth of gold was dug up in two months. Ten thousand pounds! Think of it!"

Niall stopped, full of a suppressed emotion, which threatened, I thought, to shake his strong frame to pieces.

"The old minstrels sang of the gold—the yellow gold, the red gold; and, touching the strings of their harps, the bards told the kings of other days of treasure that had been buried—vases, ornaments, trinkets of all sorts—"

"But tell me," I interrupted, "have you found any of these things?"

"I have found these treasures time and again. Some of them are now in the British Museum, and the money for them in my cave at the Phoul-a-Phooka with the other valuables, save those which I gave to my little lady. My storehouse is in the loneliest spot, where the timorous dare not venture, where the wild horse of the legend keeps guard for

me. Once I brought my little lady there, and her eyes were so dazzled she covered them with her hands."

I listened as in a dream.

"But gold?" I asked, in an awe-stricken voice. "Have you found—"

"About a hundred ounces," he replied, "of genuine pure gold. But what is a hundred ounces where tons, perhaps, lie buried?"

He sprang up and paced the room, a fever, almost of insanity, glowing on his cheeks and in his eyes. I watched with a new interest this man, who was making the hills and streams of his loved Ireland yield up this treasure.

"It seems like a fairy-tale," I said.

"It is not fairy gold," Niall cried, with a grim smile; "and it has cost me years of slavery. I have guarded the secret with my life. I have spent long, lonely years in this cheerless cabin, haunting the streams by night, washing and rewashing the precious clay in the chill dawn, testing the gold in the fire of yonder hearth, often when the rest of the world was sleeping. Gold has been my idol, my one devotion."

"Do you get the gold in large pieces?"

"In every size, from the tiniest sparkle worth about sixpence to a lump worth several shillings."

"It is wonderful, wonderful!" I could only repeat.

"My studies in the East helped me much in my work," Niall observed; "but indeed for years past the study of precious metals, and how to procure them, has been the one object of my life."

"Even should your secret come to light," I ventured to say, "surely there is enough for every one in the bowels of the earth."

"There may be," Niall cried wildly—"oh, there may be; but no one must know of it till I have got my portion! Besides, as all gold-seekers know, the gold is as uncertain as a fickle woman. Sometimes in a stream there is but a little, or there will be much in one portion of the river's bed and none at all in the other."

"Did Roderick know?" I asked.

"Never. I was but beginning my search when he went away. I would not have told him in any case. He would have wanted to share our good fortune with every one."

"Winifred knows?"

"Yes, she knows. I could trust her with my secret."

He fell into deep abstraction; and I, watching him, could scarcely realize that this quiet, thoughtful man was the same wild being who had terrified me during the storm. It showed me the fearful power of gold over the human heart, and how it was capable of changing an ordinary gentleman of studious habits into the semblance of a wild beast. He roused himself all at once to say:

"You spoke of some plan of yours for the child?"

"My plan for Winifred," I said boldly, though with some inward fear, "was to take her away with me to America, and put her at a convent school, where she should be educated as befits her station in life."

His face grew dark as I spoke, and he flashed upon me one of his old suspicious glances.

"You wanted to take her to America! How am I to know that you are not, after all, an agent sent by Roderick or by some of the mother's people?"

"You have only my word for it," I said, slightly drawing myself up. "I can offer no other proof."

"I suppose it is all right," he replied, with another keen

look and a deep sigh; "if not, then has misfortune indeed overtaken me."

This was said as if to himself; and presently, raising his voice, he asked:

"Pray what do they teach at these convent schools?"

"They teach their pupils to be Christian ladies," I answered warmly.

He was silent again for a moment or two, then he went on:

"I have grounded her in all her studies, and if she continues with me she will be thoroughly well instructed in many branches. But there are some things I can not teach her. I know that all too well."

"And those are precisely what the child would learn at a convent school," I put in eagerly.

"Think for a moment," he exclaimed vehemently, "what such a parting would mean to me! I am old. I might never see her again. Even if I can rely on your good faith once you are out of my sight, I will forever stand in fear of some evil befalling her, some mischance which would upset all my plans."

"I thought you intended to take her to America yourself?" I said.

"Yes; to find her father, and to persuade him to come back with us to his native land."

"But he might refuse."

"That would be unlikely, unless he was married again. In that case, I would bring Winifred back to be lady of the castle."

I sat thoughtful, musing over this plan, which seemed like a dream of romance. But Niall's voice broke in on my musings:

"Should I let the child go with you, it is on condition that

she does not see Roderick until I give my consent; and should I want her back here in the meantime, she must come."

"She is not to see her father?"

"No, no! She must go direct to the school, and Roderick must not know of her presence there."

"It seems hard!" I murmured.

"Hard! But does he deserve better?" said Niall. "For whatever cause, he has left Winifred to my care and that of Mrs. Meehan all these years."

"That is true," I responded; "and I accept the conditions."

"It will be the saddest moment of my life when I see my little lady depart," Niall exclaimed; and already his face was drawn and haggard and his voice husky at the prospect. "But should my dream be realized, she will acquire the manner, the accomplishments, the graces which our Wicklow hills can not furnish. You are right; she must go."

I was at once touched and astonished at his ready compliance with my wishes. I had feared it might be a tedious task to overcome his objections. But the clear mind of the man had at once perceived the advantages of my plan.

"You see, I am putting entire trust in you. I am confiding Winifred to you. I have already told you my secret."

"You shall never have cause to regret either," I cried warmly. "And as for the conditions, they shall be put down in writing, and Winifred shall be restored to you when and where you desire."

"What will these hills be like without her!" he exclaimed, rising and going to the window.

There was again that wildness in tone and manner as of a mind which had become somewhat unsettled by the strange, wandering life he had led, with its fever of suspense and excitement.

"What will the greensward be like, child of my heart, when your foot no more shall press it? What will the hills be like when your eyes—asthore machree!—shall not look upon them? And the Glen of the Dargle shall have lost its charm when you are not there, its spirit!"

He tossed his arms above his head and rushed wildly from the cabin. I waited for a time; but as he did not return, I slowly followed the homeward path, content with what I had accomplished for one day, but wondering much at the strange revelations which Niall had made.

Before I reached home I suddenly met Winifred. Her face was clouded, and at first she scarcely noticed me.

"What is the matter with Niall?" she asked. "I met him and he would not look at me. I called his name, but he ran away and would not speak."

"He will tell you all in good time," I answered soothingly.

"It is you!" she said, looking at me keenly, with a glance like that of her kinsman. "You have been vexing him: saying something that he did not like."

"We must all have things said to us that we do not like, when it is for our good," I remarked gravely.

"I wish you had never come here! I wish you would go away!" Winifred exclaimed, stamping her little foot till it stuck in the soft earth.

"See, how useless is ill-temper!" I said; for I was rather annoyed by her petulance. "You have spoiled your pretty shoe. And as for going away, when I go, you will go too."

She turned pale, then trembled and stammered out a question or two:

"I—go—with you? Where?"

"All the way to America."

L OF C.

"To America!" said Winifred, in an amazement which seemed blended with fear or emotion of some sort.

"Yes; over the great sea," I went on, "where you will see many new and beautiful things."

"But I don't want to see them!" she replied, with an energy that startled me.

"That is not a nice way to put it, dear," I said gently. "I hope, indeed, you will be a very good girl and give me as little trouble as possible. You will have to leave your wilful ways in the mountains with the sprites."

"Niall will never allow it!" she cried, with childish triumph.

"Niall has just said 'Yes.' So I give you a month to prepare," I declared firmly. I had determined to exert my authority from that moment forward, as it was necessary that I should.

"Niall has said 'Yes'!" she repeated, drawing a sharp breath and speaking as one in a dream. Her lip quivered; two tears shone in her eyes, but she would not let them fall. Turning on me instead, with a curious tone of command, she asked:

"Who are you?"

"A friend."

"An enemy, I think!" said Winifred, and with that she turned sharply away and was soon hidden in the brushwood. But I heard her only a few moments afterward, sobbing aloud and calling, as Niall had done, on Nature:

"I can't leave the hills and the streams and the valleys! I can't leave Wicklow and the Dargle and the castle, and dear Granny and Moira and Barney and Niall! Oh, it would break my heart!"

She sobbed again for a few moments; then her voice rang out defiantly:

"I will *not* go! I will hide in the hills, as the O'Byrnes did in the wars. I will live in a cave like them and not go to that hateful America."

I went back to the inn, resolving to try to win the child over to my ideas as I had done her uncle. I foresaw many difficulties in the way; and as I sat down on the wooden bench outside the door I began to wonder if my idea was, after all, a mistaken one. The air was very fresh and pure after the storm; the verdure of that Emerald Isle, so fondly remembered by its exiled sons and daughters, was rich and glowing after the rain; and the hills were shrouded in a golden haze, darkening into purple near the summit. I sat and listened to a thrush singing in the lilac bush near which I had seen Winifred sitting on the morning of our visit to the castle, till a strange peace stole over me and I lost all my fears.

CHAPTER XIII.

TWO VISITS.

My next duty was to obtain Granny Meehan's consent to Winifred's departure for America. I found her sitting beside the hearth in her accustomed place, with the cat at her feet. Winifred was absent, and in the outer court was the pleasant sunshine falling over solitude. Only the fowls, so variously named by Winifred, disported themselves before the window.

Mrs. Meehan greeted me cheerfully and cordially, and I saw that no shadow of future events had fallen upon her yet. Our conversation at first was on the usual topics—the fine weather, the prospect of good crops. Then, as it were of a sudden, I remarked:

"Well, Mrs. Meehan, I have seen the schoolmaster."

Granny started, and stared at me in silence for a few moments.

"Where, then, ma'am dear?" she asked uneasily.

"In his own house."

"In the cabin up beyant there?" she cried in amazement. "Tell me was it up there?"

"Yes, in the cabin amongst the hills, on the day of the storm," I answered very calmly.

"The Lord be good to us, ma'am! And what took you to that fearsome place—in such weather, too? Couldn't you have got shelter anywhere else?"

She was quite pale at the thought.

"I went purposely, Mrs. Meehan; for I had made up my mind to ask him for Winifred."

"To ask him for Winifred!" she echoed in astonishment. Then her manner showed something of offence. "It was in my charge the colleen was left," she declared; "and 'tis I, and not Niall of the hill, that has the say about her."

"But I was sure of your consent already," said I, quietly.

"And what made you sure of it, axin' your pardon for the question?"

"Your intelligence, your love for the girl, and your fear of Niall's influence over her."

She seemed mollified, and I went on:

"Your intelligence will show you it is for the best, your love for Winifred will make you wish the best for her, while your fear of Niall—"

"Speak lower, ma'am: he may be in hearin'!" she said anxiously. "He's that strange he does be appearin' when least you expect."

"Well, in any case, I knew you would not oppose her going with me to America."

"To America, is it?" cried the woman, bristling up as fiercely almost as Niall himself. "Oh, then, how am I to know that you're playin' me no tricks—that you haven't been sent to take her away from us?"

"Mrs. Meehan," I said gravely, "I gave you my word as a lady that I knew nothing of her till I came here."

"I ax your pardon!" she said humbly. "But, O ma'am dear, think of America, over the big ocean, and me sittin' here alone among the hills, powerless to go to her if she needs me!"

"She will be taken good care of," I said. "I shall put

her in a convent, where she will be thoroughly educated and prepared for the part she has to play in life."

"And will she be goin' away from the old land forever?" she asked, clasping her feeble hand over her heart.

"By no means. It is my hope and wish that she come back here."

"But him you call the schoolmaster will never allow it!" she cried, with something of the same triumph which had appeared in Winifred's face.

"The schoolmaster has already given his consent," I said quietly.

"Given his consent!" repeated the old woman, flushing and paling; and then a great wonder seemed to overcome every other feeling. "You saw him in the cabin 'mongst the hills and you got his consent! But weren't you afeared, ma'am, to go there by yourself?"

"I was somewhat afraid at first," I admitted; "but I felt that for the child's sake it had to be done."

"And you'll take her away from me?" the old woman cried piteously. "How can you, ma'am?"

"Don't you see yourself how much the best thing it is for her?" I urged. "You are afraid of Niall's influence over her; she can not grow up as she is, roaming the hills, with no companions of her own age or rank."

She was silent a long time, and I thought she was praying.

"You are right, ma'am dear," she said tranquilly; "it is for the best, and it seems to be God's holy will. But when must it be?"

"We shall sail from here in August, I think," I answered. "And then I can place her in a convent near New York for the opening term of the school year. If she stays there even two or three years, it will make a great difference. And then

she will come back to take her place at the castle, if it can be made habitable; or, at all events, in the neighborhood."

"But Miss Winifred's father is in the United States of America?" said the old woman, tremulously.

"Yes: he is in New York. I know him and have spoken to him."

The old woman's face flushed with a joyful, eager flush.

"You know my boy, the pulse of my heart—Roderick?"

"Yes," I answered. "I know him, I may say, well."

A look of trouble suddenly replaced the brightness of Granny Meehan's face.

"Then know too that if Roderick sets his eyes on Miss Winifred, we'll never see her more here in the old land."

There was something indescribably mournful in her tone.

"Himself will take her," she went on; "and who can say that his new wife will give her a mother's love or a mother's care?"

"He has no new wife!" I said—"no wife at all; and perhaps, among us, we can win him back to the old world—to Ireland, to Wicklow."

"Say that again, asthore machree!" cried the old woman, —"that he has no wife at all. Oh, then, sure there's hope for him comin' back!"

"Niall has made it a condition of his consent to Winifred's going," I observed, "that Roderick shall not see his child nor know of her presence in New York till the old man gives the signal."

"The old rap!" cried Granny, with sudden ire. "'Tis like him, the marplot, the—but the Lord forgive me what I'm sayin'! And hasn't he been a father to the little one, with all his queer ways and his strayin' about the hills when others were in their beds?"

"He is altogether devoted to her," I said; "and has a right to make what request he pleases."

"True for you, ma'am—true for you," said Granny. "And my old heart's so full with all you've told me that it seems as if the world was turned the wrong way round. Oh, what a desolate spot this will be when Miss Winifred's gone out of it!"

"Only for a time; and then, if all goes as we hope, think what happiness is in store for every one!"

"I'll try to think of it, ma'am,—indeed and I will," said Granny. "And, sittin' here in the dark alone, I'll be prayin', mornin', noon and night, that all may turn for the best."

"Your prayers will help more than anything else can," I declared; "be sure of that, and keep up your heart. But now I think I'll call upon the priest—Father Owen, I believe?"

"Yes: Father Owen Farley."

"Very well. I shall see him and tell him all about the matter. He may be a help to us, too."

I bade the old woman good-morning and went on my way, feeling that I had quite overcome the opposition of those interested in the girl. I had only to fear now some wilfulness on the part of Winifred herself, and I counted on Father Owen to help me in that direction. I had already discovered that she had a strong, lively faith, the robust piety so common among the children of Ireland, and the respect for priests which seems to come by instinct. I had heard her speak of Father Owen with a reverence beautiful to see in one so young.

As I went on my way to the chapel, the sun, which had been under a cloud, suddenly burst out from a sky of tender, dappled gray. There was a smell of the woods in the air,

which a morning shower had brought forth; and a robin was singing as I approached Father Owen's residence. The songster sat on the bough of a tree, his red breast swelling with the melody he sent forth. His bright eye catching sight of me caused him to trill out more bravely than ever, as if to say: "See how this little Irish robin can sing! Did you ever hear a finer song than that?"

I think it was at the same thought Father Owen was laughing as I drew near. He stood in his little garden, a fine, venerable figure, with snow-white hair, worn rather long on his neck. He was about the medium height, thin to emaciation, with wonderfully bright eyes and the smile of a child. He turned at my approach. I introduced myself.

"You will know me best, Father," I observed, "as the lady from America."

"The lady from America?" he said. "I'm glad to meet you. Of course I've seen you in church and at the holy table. This is a real pleasure, though. Come into my little house now, and let me hear something of your wonderful country beyond the sea."

I followed, charmed with his courtesy.

"I was listening to that rogue of a robin," he said, as he led me in; "and I think he knew very well he had an auditor. Birds, I suppose, have their vanity, like the rest of us."

"The same thought occurred to me, Father," I answered. "He did swell out his little throat so, and sent his eye wandering about in search of applause."

"There's a deal of human nature in birds," said the priest, laughing at the quaint conceit; "and in the lower animals as well—every cat and dog among them."

We chatted on from one subject to another, till at last I introduced that which had brought me.

"Father," I began, "I want to talk to you specially about Winifred, the orphan of the castle."

"Winifred!" he said, his face lighting up. "A lovable, charming child, but a bit wayward; pure and bright in spirit as yonder mountain stream, but just as little to be restrained."

"I thought I would like to hear your opinion of a plan I have formed with regard to her."

He bowed his head, with an inimitable courtesy in the gesture, as if to signify his willingness to hear, and fixed his dark eyes upon me.

"My idea is to take her to America and place her for a few years in a convent."

"America," he said thoughtfully, "is very far off; and if she has to live in Ireland, might it not be better to select a convent nearer home?"

Then I went more into details: told him of Roderick and of the possibility of bringing father and child together. His opposition—if opposition it could be called—vanished at once, and he cordially entered into the idea.

"Granny Meehan will certainly consent if we all think it best for the child," he said; "but what of that extraordinary being in the mountains up yonder? What of Niall?"

"He has consented."

"You amaze me!" cried the priest, holding up both hands in astonishment. "Surely it takes you Americans to accomplish anything." Then he added after a pause: "Did he mention his relationship to Winifred, which is a secret from all about here?"

"He did."

"He is a most singular character—a noble one, warped by circumstances," continued the priest, thoughtfully. "A

visionary, a dreamer. Poor Niall! he was a fine lad when I knew him first."

"You knew him when he was young, then?" I inquired.

"Yes, I knew him well. An ardent, enthusiastic boy, brave and hopeful and devout. Now—but we need not discuss that. It is as well, perhaps, that the child should be withdrawn from his influence before she is older; though, mind you, his influence over her has hitherto been for the best."

"So I have every reason to think," I assented; "but, as you say, Father, growing older, the girl will require different surroundings."

After that we talked over our plans for the best part of an hour; and the old priest showed me his simple treasures —a crucifix of rarest ivory, so exquisitely carved that I could not refrain from expressing my admiration again and again. This, with a picture or two of rare merit, had come from Rome; and reminded Father Owen, as he said, of seminary days, of walks on the Campagna in the wonderful glow of an Italian sunset, of visits to churches and art galleries. He showed me, too, his books.

"They have supplied to me," he observed, "the place of companionship and of travel. I can travel in their pages around the civilized world; and I love them as so many old friends. In the long nights of winter I have sat here, listening to the mountain storm while I read, or the streams rushing upon their way when the frost set them free."

As he talked thus there was the sound of hasty, rushing feet in the hall, and Winifred burst into the room.

CHAPTER XIV.

HOW FATHER OWEN WON THE DAY.

SHE threw upon the table an immense mass of bloom she had gathered on the banks of the Dargle; then rushed over to her beloved Father Owen, crying:

"O Father Owen, Father Owen! she wants to take me away with her to America, and it will break my heart—I know it will!"

The tears streamed down her cheeks, and she never noticed me in this wild outburst of grief.

"My child, my child," said Father Owen, "do you hear that robin singing outside there? And you, to whom God has given reason, are crying! The little robin sings in the sunshine and is calm in the storm."

"I can't help it, Father—I can't help it! The robin has no heart, but just feathers over his little bones."

Father Owen laughed, and even the girl smiled through her tears.

"Let me see sunshine again on your face," the priest said, "and hear the song on your lips. If you are going to America there's no misfortune in that—is there?"

"No misfortune to leave everything I love and go away with a stranger?"

"Not so great a stranger, Winifred," I ventured, reproachfully. "I thought we were to be friends."

The girl started at sound of my voice and blushed rosy red.

"I didn't know you were here!" she muttered confusedly.

"Well, it doesn't matter, my dear," I replied. "You have shown nothing more than natural feeling at the prospect of parting with the scenes and friends of your childhood. But I want to tell you now in presence of Father Farley that you are free to stay or go. I shall not force you to accompany me; for perhaps, after all, you will be happier here than there."

"Ah, happiness is not the only object of a life!" Father Owen said quickly. "Why, even that little bird yonder has to give up his songs in the sunshine sometimes and go to work. He has to build his nest as a shelter for his family, and he has to find them food."

He paused, looking out of the window at the little workman gaily hopping about as if making repairs in his dwelling, and thus pointing the moral and adorning the tale. When the priest turned round again to look at Winifred, her face was pale but composed, and her tears were dried on the delicate kerchief she drew from the folds of her cloak.

"To my mind it seems clear," said the priest, "that this lady's presence here just now is providential; and that her offer to take you to America is most kind, as it is most advantageous."

Winifred threw at me a glance which was neither so grateful nor so friendly as it might have been; but she looked so charming, her eyes still misty with tears and her curls falling mutinously about her face, that I forgave her on the spot.

"And yet I came here to tell you, Father Owen, that I wouldn't go!" she cried impetuously.

"Oh, did you?" said Father Owen. "Then you came here also to be told that you must go."

"*Must!*" I echoed. "Oh, no, Father—not that!"

"That and nothing else," insisted the priest. "I shall be sorry indeed to part from my Winifred"—his brown eyes rested on her with infinite kindliness. "I taught her her catechism; I prepared her for her first confession and holy communion, and to be confirmed by the bishop. I have seen her grow up like the flowers on yonder rocks. But she is not a flower: she has a human soul, and she has a destiny to fulfil here in this world. Therefore, when an offer is made to her which will give her every advantage that she now lacks, what are my feelings or Niall's or Granny's or hers?"

Winifred's eyes sought the floor in some confusion, and with a hint of new tears darkening them; for her old friend's words had touched her.

"She thinks, I suppose," he went on, "that because I am a priest I have no heart like the robin out yonder. Why, there is none of the little ones that I teach that do not creep into my heart and never get out, even when they come to be big stalwart men or women grown. But I put my feelings aside and say, 'What is best must be done.' And," continued the priest, "look at Granny! She will be left desolate in her blindness, and yet she bids you go. Poor daft Niall, too, will be a wanderer lonelier than ever without his little companion; but does he complain?"

"O Father Owen," cried Winifred, "I'll do whatever you say! You know I never disobeyed you in my life."

"That's a good child, now!" said the priest. "And I hope I wasn't too cross. Go to my Breviary there and you will find a pretty, bright picture. And here I have—bless me! —some sugar-plums. The ladies from Powerscourt brought them from Dublin and gave them to me for my little friend."

Winifred flew to the Breviary and with a joyful cry brought out a lovely picture of the Sacred Heart. The sugar-plums, however, seemed to choke her, and she put them in her pocket silently.

"When will you start for America?" asked the priest.

"The first week of August, perhaps," I answered; "so that Winifred may be in time for the opening of school."

"Well, then," said Father Owen, "it will be time enough to begin to cry on the 31st of July, Winifred my child; and you have a whole month before then."

Winifred brightened visibly at this; for a month is very long to a child.

"Meantime you will take your kind friend here, this good lady, to see the sights. She must know Wicklow well, at any rate; so that you can talk about it away over there in America. I wish I were going myself to see all the fine churches and schools and institutions that they tell me are there."

"You have never been in America, Father?" I inquired.

"Nor ever will, I'm afraid. My old bones are too stiff for traveling."

"They're not too stiff, though, to climb the mountain in all weathers," I put in. For the landlord had told me how Father Owen, in the stormiest nights of winter and at any hour, would set out, staff in hand. He would climb almost inaccessible heights, where a few straggling families had their cabins, to administer the sick or give consolation in the houses of death.

"And why wouldn't I climb?" he inquired. "Like my friend the robin, I have my work to do; and the worse for me if some of my flock are perched high up. 'Tis the worse for them, too."

I could not but laugh at the drollery of his expression.

"My purse is none of the longest either," he said, "and wouldn't reach near as far as America; and, besides, I'm better at home where my duty is."

This quaint, simple man of God attracted me powerfully, and I could not wonder at the hold he had upon his parishioners.

"Some of my poor people," he went on, "have no other friend than the soggarth; and if *he* went away what would they do at all? Winifred my pet, there's one of the geese just got into the garden. Go and chase it away; and I needn't tell you not to throw stones nor hurt it, as the boys do."

Winifred went off delightedly, and we saw her, with merry peals of laughter, pursuing the obstinate creature round and round the garden. No sooner did she put it out at the gate than it came in at a chink in the wall.

"Weary on it for a goosie!" said the priest; "though, like the rest of the world, it goes where it will do best for itself. But I want to tell you, my dear lady, while the child's away, how glad I am that she is going with you and to a convent. It was God sent you here. The finger of God is tracing out her way, and I'm sure His blessing will rest upon you for your share in the work."

At this moment Winifred, breathless from her chase, entered the room.

"Arrange your posy now, and take it over yourself to the church," said Father Owen; "and maybe I'll come over there by and by to play you something on the organ."

For it was one of Winifred's greatest pleasures to sit in the dim little chapel and listen to the strains of the small organ, which Father Owen touched with a master-hand. So the child, arranging the flowers—primroses chiefly, with their

pale gold contrasting with the green of the leaves—prepared to set out. I, taking leave of the priest, accompanied her, and sat down in a pew while Winifred went into the sacristy for a vase. She came out again and put the flowers at the foot of the Blessed Virgin's altar; then she knelt down just under the sanctuary lamp, and I saw her childish face working with the intensity of her prayer.

Presently we heard Father Owen coming in with Barney, who was to blow the organ for him. The brightness of the day was giving place to the shadows of the afternoon, and the colors were fading gradually from the stained windows. Only the light of the sanctuary lamp gleamed out in the dusk. The priest touched the keys lightly at first; then he began to play, with exquisite finish, some of the simple hymns to the Blessed Virgin which we had known since our childhood. "Hail Virgin, dearest Mary, our lovely Queen of May!" "On this day, O beautiful Mother!" "Oh, blest fore'er the Mother and Virgin full of grace," followed each other in quick succession. He passed from these to "Gentle Star of Ocean!" and finally to "Lead, Kindly Light."

The notes fell true and pure with a wonderful force and sweetness, which produced a singular effect. It seemed as if every word were being spoken direct to the soul. I felt as if I could have stayed there forever listening; and I was struck with the expression of Winifred's face as she came away from the altar, advancing toward me through the gloom. Her face, upturned to the altar, was aglow with the brightness of the sanctuary lamp.

"Isn't it beautiful?" she whispered.

I assented, and I saw that peace was made between us; for there was the old friendliness in look and tone. But I said, to make assurance doubly sure:

"This is a good place to forgive me, dear, and to think over my plan in its true light."

"You shall forgive *me!* I ought to have been glad and grateful," Winifred answered quite humbly.

There was a great sadness in her voice, however; for the sorrows of childhood are very real and very deep, though they do not last.

"Father Owen plays every trouble away into peace," I observed.

"Yes," Winifred replied dreamily.

Then we heard Father Owen coming down from the loft, and we stepped outside, thinking to meet him there and thank him for his music. But instead he went directly into the church, and I returned thither to wait for his coming. I could just discern his figure kneeling on the altar-step, the altar-lamp forming a halo about his venerable head; and I heard his voice repeating over and over again, in accents of intense fervor: "My Jesus, mercy! My Jesus, mercy!" No other prayer only that.

I stole away, more impressed than I had ever been, out into the lovely summer twilight. Winifred's hand was locked in mine as we went.

"I hope," I said before we parted, "that you will soon be very happy over my project—or, at least, very brave."

"I shall try to be very brave," she answered; "and then perhaps I'll be happy. Father Owen says so, anyway."

"He is a wise man and a saint," I answered.

"Oh, yes!" she assented, with pretty enthusiasm. "He is just like St. Patrick himself."

After that she accepted the situation cheerfully, and I never again heard her protest against going to America. Father Owen had won the day.

CHAPTER XV.

THE CAVE IN THE MOUNTAINS.

THE time fixed for our departure was drawing all too near; for the summer had been a delightful one, with much of fine weather and almost constant sunshine—rare in that land where Nature's tear is always very near her smile. I had visited the Devil's Glen, with its wondrous falls, its turbulent streams, its mountain heights, reached by a path of tangled bloom. I had seen the "sweet Vale of Avoca" and Avonmore, and Glendalough, with its seven ruined churches; and St. Kevin's Bed, and all the other delights of Wicklow, the garden of Ireland.

On most of these expeditions I had been accompanied by Winifred, with Barney and Moira. If we were driving, Barney acted as driver and guide at once; if we were on foot, he carried the luncheon basket. Very often we set out when the dew was still on the grass and the morning-star had scarcely faded from the sky.

But there was one more spot to be visited, and this time Barney and Moira were not to be of the party. Winifred had persuaded Niall to take us to the Phoul-a-Phooka, and show us there a mysterious cavern in which he kept hidden his treasures. I looked forward to this visit with a curious blending of fear and curiosity. Niall was so variable in his moods, and Father Owen agreed with me in thinking that at times his mind was unsettled and his temper dangerous. Still, I determined to take the risk.

One warm day in July Winifred and I set out in company with Niall—not, indeed, that he gave us much of his society. When we were in the car he drove in gloomy silence; when we were afoot he walked on ahead, wrapped in his cloak, with an air of gloomy preoccupation, his sugar-loaf hat serving as a sign-post which we were to follow.

When we came up at last to this celebrated spot, my breath was fairly taken away by its wild and mournful grandeur. Waterfall after waterfall came down from a height of two hundred feet, over great, rocky precipices, being spanned by a single arched bridge of Gothic design. On one side of the falls are tasteful grounds, with shaded walks and seats for the convenience of visitors; on the other, all is wild and barren—rock rising above rock, crag above crag, in a morose solitude.

It was toward this solitude that Niall led us, the noise of the waterfalls completely drowning our voices. We strode on by devious paths, turning more and more away from the water and upward by a steep ascent, till we found ourselves in surroundings shunned by the common folk, and wild, gloomy and forbidding enough to justify all that popular superstition said of this region. Once we paused to take breath, and I looked down from an eminence on the waters rushing madly to the tranquil glen below; and then I turned my gaze from the Gothic bridge, the work of man, to the mountain crag, the work of the Creator.

Suddenly Niall turned an abrupt angle, Winifred and I creeping after him. I was full of fear; but Winifred was fearless and smiling, holding my hand and encouraging me as though I had been a child. We stopped before a tangled mass of vines and brushwood. Niall pushed them aside, disclosing a small, dark entrance in the rocks, through which he

passed, signing for us to follow him. This we did, Winifred whispering:

"It's the cavern. I was here once before—that time I told you I was going to the Phoul-a-Phooka."

We bent our heads as we saw Niall do, for the entrance was very low; and we advanced some paces along a kind of passageway cut in the rock either by the hand of Nature or by some long-forgotten outlaw of the hills. A surprise awaited us, such as is common enough in underground places; for we emerged all at once from the dark into a large and tolerably well-lighted apartment. The rugged walls of rock, moss-covered in places, were dry; the floor was neatly boarded over, and a fire was ready for lighting in a corner. Above it, a cranny in the wall permitted the smoke to escape. In a little alcove apart from the principal cave were a bed, a few chairs, and a table.

"Niall lives here for weeks at a time," explained Winifred.

Niall had set a match to the fire; for, warm as the weather was outside, there was a chilliness within as of a vault. Presently the sods blazed up, the flames leaping and glowing about the stooping figure of the old man, who seemed like some strange magician. We seated ourselves on the rough, deal chairs, near a table of similar material that occupied the middle of the cave; and Niall opened a curiously contrived cupboard and brought forth some plates and cups and saucers. Winifred, opening our luncheon basket, took out and spread upon the table its simple contents—cold meat, home-made bread, a pat of fresh butter, and a jar of apple jelly, which the landlord had specially recommended.

Niall then abruptly left the cavern, and returned in a few minutes with a pitcher of goat's milk; but how or where he had obtained it he did not explain.

"I think he keeps some goats out there on the rocks," said Winifred in a low voice to me, "so that he can drink the milk when he is living here."

Our walk had given us an appetite; the coolness of the place, despite the fire, was refreshing. Winifred was in high spirits, making a jest of everything and thoroughly enjoying the simple repast. I, forgetting my late fears, was also disposed to be merry. Niall alone maintained a moody silence, eating but little, and drinking only sparingly of the goat's milk. When the meal was over, Winifred fetched some water from a mountain spring, and we washed the dishes in a rude earthen vessel and restored them to their places in the cupboard built against the rock. When this was done, Niall said abruptly:

"I will show you now what you have come here to see—the treasure which the earth has yielded up to me. Some of these things are from the tombs of kings or warriors; some buried at the time, perhaps, of the Danish invasion. They are all, I believe, of value, greater or less."

When he had thus spoken he began to creep around the cavern with a furtive, stealthy movement, examining every chink and cranny, as though unseen eyes were watching him. At last he approached a certain corner, withdrawing again, and looking all around him with eager, troubled eyes. Then he touched what seemed to be a secret spring, and before us was another dark passage.

This dark passage had been made by some former occupant of the cave, who stood, perhaps, in danger of his life. We entered, and at the end of it was a second and much smaller cavern, the darkness of which was relieved by the gleam of shining metal. I stood still and drew my breath hard. Was I dreaming, or had I gone back to the world of

the Arabian Nights? This could not be Ireland, and Niall a prosaic, end-of-the-century Irishman! He must surely be a magician of old—one of the genii sprung from Aladdin's lamp; and the child beside him, in her delicate, aerial loveliness, some fairy showing the treasures of the earth to mortal eyes.

Niall, putting aside his gloom, suddenly brightened into enthusiasm, which lighted up his face as with the fire of genius. He told us of the old warriors, chiefs and kings, or of the beautiful ladies in shining satin robes, who had worn these costly ornaments—the fibulæ or brooches, the breast-plates of thin burnished gold, the crowns, the bracelets, the collars, some studded with precious gems. And there were shining heaps of gold besides, fresh from the mint. These Niall had obtained in exchange for the ore which he had dug up from the bed of streams and also for gold still in the lump.

The time seemed to pass as in a dream. We were never tired listening, Niall of dwelling upon the glories of his treasure-house. The old man had spent hours and days polishing those articles with chemicals, with whose use he was well acquainted, and some of which gave out a strange, pungent odor; for it had been no small labor to clean away the rust perhaps of ages.

"Every year I part with some of them," Niall said mournfully, rather as one who spoke to himself than to us. "And it is hard, hard; but I add a little each time to the pile of coin. When the day comes I shall sell them all—all!"

He motioned us to go out again into the first cavern; and, touching the spring, he closed away the treasures and sank once more into a listless mood, seated at the table, his head buried in his hands. Winifred, who had listened with

open-mouthed delight to Niall's tales of the past, and had been as much interested in seeing the treasures as though she saw them for the first time, now sat thoughtfully beside me, gazing into the fire. Presently she grew tired of inaction, and, springing to her feet, began to dance about the cavern —a graceful, charming figure in that rocky setting. And as she danced she chanted a weird song in the Irish tongue, which Niall had taught her.

Gradually Niall raised his head. The air or the words of the song seemed to have a strange effect upon him—to rouse him, as it were, from his lethargy. He fixed his eyes upon Winifred, watching her every movement with a fierce eagerness. Then his eyes turned upon me, and there was the fire almost of insanity lighting them. As he gazed he rose from his chair, coming toward me with a slow, gliding step, while I sat paralyzed with terror.

"Why should I not kill you," he said, in a deep, low tone, like the growling of some mountain torrent, "and bury you here in the hills? You have brought the curse upon me. Like the carrion bird, your coming has heralded evil. My heart is burning within me because of the sorrow that consumes it. You have charmed the child from me to take her away to the unknown land."

"But remember," I managed to say, "that it is with your consent, and that I have promised to bring her back again when you will."

"Promised!" he repeated fiercely. "As if you could control events—govern the wilful mind of a child and force her to remember!"

There was a deadly calmness in his voice, more fearful than the wildest outburst of anger; and I trembled so violently that I could almost hear my teeth chattering.

"Ha!" he cried, "you are afraid of me. I can see you tremble. And you may well; for Niall, in his wrath, is terrible as the mountain torrent in its course."

I fixed my eyes upon him as upon a wild beast whose fury I was striving to tame. Every moment I feared that he might spring upon me, when the voice of Winifred suddenly broke the spell. It was evident she had not at first perceived what was going on.

"Niall!" she said imperiously. "What are you saying to the lady? Why are you trying to frighten her?"

She interposed her slender figure between us as she spoke.

Niall's eyes sought the ground in a crestfallen manner, and he muttered:

"Forgive me, my little lady!"

"I won't forgive you if you act like that any more, Niall!" she declared. "You know how the old chieftains and kings you are always talking about treated their guests. And isn't the lady your guest here in your own cavern, Niall?"

Niall murmured:

"I forgot, I forgot! 'Tis all my poor head. At times I can think only of one thing—that she is taking you away."

"And 'tis you who want me to go for my own good," Winifred said gravely.

Niall turned away with a groan.

"I am willing to go," Winifred went on, "because Father Owen said I should. He knows what is best. He told me it was God sent the lady here."

Niall broke into an uncontrollable fury, which caused even Winifred to step back.

"What care I for Father Owen or the lady?" he exclaimed.

Her face was pale; I think it was the first time she had

ever been afraid of Niall. But she faced the old man bravely; though his face, working with passion, his streaming hair and huge frame made him look like a veritable Cyclops.

"Be still, Niall," she cried, "or the lady and I will go away out of your cave this minute, and be very sorry that we came here."

She put her small hand on his arm, and the touch seemed to calm him.

"Forgive me!" he murmured once more, in the helpless, bewildered tone of a little child; and, sinking again into one of the chairs near the table, he buried his face in his hands and so remained for some moments. We did not disturb him by so much as a word; but I, relieved somewhat from my late suspense, though dreading a new access of fury, and eager to be gone, let my eyes rove round that singular place. The rugged face of the rock above our heads and all around was lit by the crackling flames of the turf which burned so brightly. I was startled from my thoughts by the voice of Niall; but this time it was soft and low as that of Winifred herself. Suddenly rising from his chair, he made me a low bow and offered a humble apology for his late rudeness. After that he was the same amiable and courteous gentleman he so often appeared, and as pleasant as possible, talking a great deal and telling us many interesting things.

"In this cave," he said, "during the penal times more than one priest took refuge. Mass was said here, and the people flocked from far and near to attend it. Here in the troubles of '98 it is said that the patriot O'Byrne took refuge. This may be the precise cavern in which he dwelt, or it may not; but it gives the place an interest—a sad interest."

He paused and looked around him for an instant.

"I shall love this cave better than ever now," said Wini-

fred; "and I shall often think of it when I am far away in the New World—"

Her voice broke a little.

"Think of it, my child!" cried Niall. "Oh, *do* think of it when you are far beyond the ocean! Think of whatever will make you love Ireland and make you remember."

The tears coursed down his cheeks and there was anguish in his voice.

"Don't cry, Niall!" said Winifred. "I shall always remember you and your cave and dear old Granny and Wicklow and Ireland."

She said the words as solemnly as if they were a vow; and they had a weird sound there in that hole in the rocks which had sheltered many a noble and saintly soul.

"There spoke my own lady!" cried Niall, triumphantly.

"Nothing shall ever make me forget," added Winifred.

"I, for my part," I broke in, "shall do my best to help you to remember; and so I solemnly promise here on this holy ground, where Mass has been said and where martyrs have trod."

It was near evening when we left that wonderful spot, and, deafened once more by the noise of the Phoul-a-Phooka, retraced our steps in silence.

CHAPTER XVI.

IN THE CAPITAL.

THE August morning which was to see our departure dawned at last. The leave-taking with old Granny Meehan was very pathetic. The poor woman, with her deep resignation, her confidence in God's providence, was a striking illustration of the best virtues of her race. Calmly she bade us farewell, praying many a prayer, invoking many a blessing on the beloved head of her little charge. We left her sitting at her accustomed seat near the hearth, with Tabby purring against her and the pleasant sunshine flooding the apartment.

Winifred had been up early, as she said, to bid "good-by!" to every stick and stone. She called each fowl in the court-yard by name, as she had done on that other morning when I saw her feeding them; and her tears fell silently as she bent over them.

When the moment came to say the last farewell, Winifred seized Brown Peter, the cat, in her arms; and the animal blinked knowingly, and purred and rubbed its head against her soft cheek. Then Winifred threw her arms once more around Granny's neck, and that part of the leave-taking was over. Barney and Moira set up a howl and followed us down as far as the inn, where the jaunting-car with the luggage was waiting for us.

Niall I did not see at all. He had taken leave of Winifred the evening before, and then, with a wild gesture of despair, had fled to the hills. He left for me a letter of instructions,

recalling all my promises and the conditions upon which he had allowed the child to go. With the letter was a sum of money to be used for Winifred's education. Could I have seen him I would have begged him to take back this latter; for when I had proposed taking the girl with me to America and putting her in a convent, it was, of course, to be at my own expense. I mentally resolved not to spend a penny of the amount, but to put it at interest for Winifred.

At the inn we found Father Owen in conversation with the landlord. He came forward at once to greet us, crying out cheerfully to the child:

"So there you are, my pet, setting out upon your travels to seek your fortune, like the people in the fairy books!"

Winifred's grief, which had been of a gentle and restrained character throughout, and unlike what might have been expected from her impetuous disposition, broke out again at sight of her beloved friend.

"Tut, tut, my child!" cried the priest. "This isn't April. Nature is smiling, and you must smile too. You're going away to a great, fine country; and when you've seen everything, you'll be coming back to tell us all about it."

Winifred wept silently, her tears falling down upon her gingham frock, so that she had to wipe them away. Father Owen turned to me, thinking it better, perhaps, to let the bitter, short-lived grief of childhood take its course.

"And so you're leaving Wicklow and Ireland, carrying with you, I hope, a good impression."

"That I am," I responded heartily; "and my most fervent wish is that I may come back again."

"To be sure you will, with Winifred here; and I hope, if it be God's will, we'll all be here to receive you."

"I hope so indeed," I answered.

"I had a letter a few days ago from Father Brady in New York," went on Father Owen. "I was in the seminary with him in France. He knows you well and is glad I made your acquaintance."

"I have known Father Brady for many years," I replied; "he is a great friend of mine."

The old priest nodded as if to express his satisfaction. I thought, perhaps, he had written to make assurance doubly sure as to my fitness for the care of the child. If so, I could only admire his wisdom.

"Niall is in a bad way," he whispered; "and will be, I don't doubt, for days to come. I met him raging and tearing through the woods like a maniac. That is his manner of expressing grief. It was useless to argue with him, so I just had to come away and leave him."

I told Father Owen how shocked I was to hear this, but he answered:

"Oh, he will get over the worst of it in a few days! How different, though, from Granny Meehan! I went in to see her yesterday. She's marked with grace, is that poor blind woman. 'It's God's will for the child to go,' she said; 'and if I never have her with me again here below, why, we'll meet above in glory, and we'll be the happier for this sorrow.' Wasn't that beautiful, my dear lady? didn't it make me ashamed of my own shortcomings!"

I assented heartily.

"Yes, Father: she has a fine nature and a beautiful faith."

Meanwhile Winifred dried her tears, and was trying to soothe her humble friends, who had accompanied us with lamentations all the way.

"I'll come back again," Winifred said to them; "I won't

be *very* long away, and I'll bring each of you something from America."

Her voice quivered as she made these promises, which caused Moira's face to brighten a little through her tears, and Barney to stammer out, brokenly:

"Och, then, Miss Winifred alanna, if you bring us back yourself, it's all we'll be wantin'!"

His red eyes and tear-stained cheeks gave force and sincerity to his words.

"Be a man now, Barney," said Father Owen, "and just tell Miss Winifred you wish her joy in the fine voyage she's going to take. Come, Moira my girl, dry your eyes and say good-by. Look how the sun is shining, and think how the goodness of God is over those that go and those that stay, just like yonder blue sky. Hear the thrush and the blackbird in the hedges giving glory to God whatever comes."

By this time we were seated in the car. I exchanged a few farewell words with my landlord, who showed real emotion at our departure.

"God be with you, ma'am!" he cried. "It's yourself has brightened us all up for weeks past. And God be with you too, Miss Winifred dear! Sure we'll be missin' your very pranks. Do you mind the day that you led me astray in the hills above, makin' b'lieve you were a Will-o'-the wisp?"

And the landlord forced a laugh, which was not very genuine. I think he would have continued his reminiscences longer had not Father Owen judged it best to put an end to the parting scene.

"Don't be keeping them any longer," he said; "let them get away before the heat of the day. And now I'll give you my last blessing, Winifred my dear, and your kind friend too."

Winifred knelt at the old priest's feet in the morning sunshine. I, being already seated in the car, bent my head. Father Owen solemnly raised his hand—the consecrated hand of God's minister,—looking upward, while his white hair framed his face like an aureola. Fervently he invoked the blessing of Heaven upon me and upon the child, upon our voyage and our arrival. His voice broke as he came to the last words, and he attempted to say no more; while I made a sign to the driver, who drove quickly from the door, followed by a parting howl from Barney and Moira.

I stole a last glance at the lovely Glen of the Dargle, the waterfall in the distance, and the natural bridge spanning the ravine, on which I had first seen Winifred. The thought flashed into my mind that I had come into the paradise of her youth, disturbing its idyllic peace; whether for better or worse was yet to be seen. I consoled myself with the assurance that, in any event, I had acted for the best.

We took the Enniskerry road to Dublin, and the drive was delightful. At one point in the journey we passed between the rude granite sides of that cleft in the mountains known as "The Scalp." As I looked up at them in their stern grandeur I had an uneasy feeling that some of the huge masses of rock, which appeared to be quite loose, might tumble upon our heads. Winifred, who was becoming, if not more cheerful, at least more composed, was greatly interested in "The Scalp," and told me the legend of the place.

"The devil," she said, "was once driving sheep to Dublin, and when he reached this mountain he couldn't get through it. So he gave a great kick with his foot and made the passage for himself and his flocks. And that, 'tis said, is why it is so wild and strange. But of course it isn't true," Winifred concluded, eying the great rocks above

us with her wistful eyes. "Still, it is different from other mountains."

"It has an uncouth shape," I agreed; "and I suppose that's what put it into the people's heads that the devil must have had a hand in its formation."

We arrived in Dublin somewhat tired after our drive, which was not, however, so very long; and found ourselves comfortably lodged by night in a hotel on Sackville Street, whence we were to set forth again on our travels in a few days. For I had purposely arranged that we might spend a little time in the capital of Ireland, so that Winifred might get at least a bird's-eye view of it. I could not guess what was passing in her mind as we went out, after resting a while, to stroll about in the lighted streets. She had never been in a city before, and must have been interested in so much that was novel. But she said little: she had not yet recovered her natural buoyancy.

The following morning, however, we set out specially for sight-seeing. We went for a walk in the Phœnix Park, and from a vantage-point near the magazine looked down on the entire city, with its splendid bridges, its domes and spires. We saw the Nelson Pillar and the Wellington Monument, and we roamed at will along the verdant banks of the beautiful Liffey. We saw the Viceregal Lodge and the Corinthian Pillar and the Royal Hospital of Kilmainham. Then, of course, we had to see the churches. It would be tedious indeed to set down here all that we did see.

We were walking along Westmoreland Street one afternoon, just as the sun was setting. There had been a heavy shower, which had relieved the sultriness of an August day, and the ground was damp; but the trees were a brighter green and sent forth a sweeter fragrance for the rain. Winifred said suddenly:

"I remember this place very well—Dublin, I mean. I was here long ago, when I was little."

"Yes? I suppose one's memory does go back very far," I observed thoughtfully. "But can you recall, for instance, where you lived?"

She shook her head.

"It was in a big house," she answered, "with a good many stairs in it and a lot of people. Some of them may have been servants. And I remember a lady in a yellow dress. Perhaps she was my mother."

She stopped abruptly, as though the subject were painful; then resumed:

"Since I came to this place, I remember a good many things. The lady in the yellow dress was standing one evening in a great big room, and she had a flower in her hair. Oh, she was very beautiful! A gentleman came in. He was tall and dark."

"With very bright eyes?" I put in eagerly.

"Yes, they were bright," she assented; "at least I think so. I remember the lady better than the gentleman. They were talking, and I couldn't understand much of what they said; but I am almost sure the gentleman was angry, for his face got very red. Then the lady laughed, and the gentleman went away quickly and shut the door hard. The lady laughed again and said to me: 'I hope you haven't your father's temper, child. Poor Roderick! he does flare up so quick. He is just raving now because I don't want to go to some outlandish place in the hills.'"

The child stopped, but the little drama of the past which she had evoked told me a great deal. Niall had blamed Roderick for not bringing his wife to the castle; but the wife—a somewhat hard and cold beauty, as old Granny

Meehan had once described her—would not come. Roderick had not cared to throw the blame upon her, and so had quarrelled with his kinsman. Winifred seemed to ponder upon what she had just told me.

"I wonder where he wanted her to go?" she said slowly.

I did not answer; for I knew it would pain her to hear her dear old castle described as an "outlandish place."

"And I wonder how he could be angry with her," the child continued, "she was so pretty and had on such a lovely dress!"

"Beauty is not the only thing, and fine dress still less," I urged.

Winifred turned on me with flashing eyes, as though I had cast some reflection upon the phantom evoked from her youth by the presence of familiar scenes.

"But that was my mother!" she cried, as if that silenced every objection. Then she added, more gently: "I am sorry my father was angry with her."

"Yet your father has a noble heart," I declared.

She smiled as if pleased.

"Some day I may see *him*," she said; "but my mother is dead."

There was great pathos in that simple remark; and after that Winifred, in her usual fashion, turned away altogether from the subject. Just then we came to a point whence we had a distant view of the Wicklow Hills. I called Winifred's attention to them. She gazed at them with tear-dimmed eyes, and I think after that took very little interest in the rest of the landscape.

"My own hills!" she said. "Oh, I wonder if Niall is abroad on them now, and if Barney and Moira are leading poor Cusha to the pasture? And Granny, I suppose, is sitting

alone—all alone. She can not go out on the hills nor see their beauty."

I tried to divert her thoughts, but for the time being it was useless. That was our last day in Dublin. Early on the morrow we were to set out for Liverpool, whence we were to sail for the Land of the Free.

CHAPTER XVII.

ARRIVAL IN NEW YORK.

Our voyage to America was a very pleasant one. The weather was excellent. The warm glow of midsummer was over everything, and the cool ocean breezes were most grateful as we sat at evening on the deck and watched the stars burn above our heads in the sky, which always seems so vast when one is on the face of the water. After the first two or three days, neither of us was seasick, and Winifred took to the sea at once. She loved the salt air, the cool spray blowing in her face as she stood upon the deck, her hair flying about her and her face aglow. Often she spoke of the dear land she had left and of her dear ones, while her eyes filled with tears and her voice trembled with emotion.

One afternoon, as we watched the sun glinting on the waves, Winifred said:

"Just now that same sun is lighting all the hills! That was what made people call them, in the Irish tongue, the hills of 'the gilt spurs.'"

"That is a pretty name," I observed; "and well describes how they look at this hour of a fine evening."

"I wish I could see them now," said Winifred; and then she fell silent, as if in thought.

She was very shy of the strangers on board the steamer, and rarely exchanged a word with any of them except at table; though many of them noticed her and spoke with admiration of her charming face and her graceful ways.

It was a lovely, calm morning when we steamed into New York Bay. We both were up early and on deck; and I pointed out to Winifred Staten Island, lying green and garden-like on the water's breast; and Governor's Island, with its forts; and Bedloe's Island, with its huge Liberty statue, the goddess standing with colossal torch at the entrance to the New World. At last there was New York itself, the Empire City, the great metropolis; and over it rested a haze, whence emerged the steeple of Old Trinity, the Custom House, and the tops of various high buildings, which filled Winifred with wonder; she had never seen anything like these "sky-scrapers," as they are called. She talked of them even after we had landed, and as we drove up Broadway to the hotel were I had my quarters. This great thoroughfare seemed to bewilder her altogether.

"The people!" she cried—"all the people! Why, they are thicker together than trees in a wood," and she simply stopped her ears against the noise. "It seems as if there was a thunderstorm going on all the time!" she exclaimed.

She was much amused also at the swift, gliding motion of the cable-cars, unlike anything she had yet seen.

"Isn't it all wonderful!" she would cry. "Oh, if Niall could see this!"

"He has seen just as wonderful sights and far more so," I reminded her. "You know how much he has travelled."

"Well, if Barney and Moira and the other people from home could see this place, they'd think they were dreaming. I'm not quite sure that I won't wake up—only," she added, with one of her droll looks, "I couldn't be asleep in such a noise."

We had reached the corner of Twenty-third Streeet, and I saw Madison Square and the Fifth Avenue Hotel arising on

my vision. There was even an unusual traffic just then. Cars, express wagons, private carriages, vehicles of all sorts, were crowding and jostling one another to the imminent risk of those within them, as well as those who attempted to cross on foot. The carriage in which we sat had to stop for an instant, and in that instant I saw standing at the corner of the street Roderick O'Byrne. His face was clouded by care or anxiety of some sort, which wholly changed its ordinary bright character. He was looking thoughtfully before him, while he waited a favorable opportunity to make the crossing.

Suddenly his eyes fell full upon Winifred, who was looking out of the window with eager interest. He started as if he had been stung. Yet he could not possibly have recognized the child, who was, happily, unconscious of his regard. It must have been some resemblance he discovered in her. Fortunately, he was so absorbed in his study of her face that he did not perceive me. I shrank back as far as possible in my corner of the vehicle and waited breathlessly, till next moment the carriage swept onward, and those two, so closely bound by the tenderest ties of kindred, were parted in the great vortex.

I felt a sense of relief that Roderick had not glanced in my direction. Had he done so, he would inevitably have recognized me, and I should have been confronted at our next meeting with all manner of awkward inquiries. For I could not tell him that his daughter was in my keeping and then refuse to let him see or communicate with her.

The hotel seemed a most magnificent place to Winifred; for though we had been in very comfortable quarters in Dublin, the luxury of a New York hotel seems quite a different affair. The service in the dining-room, the table appointments, the variety of the bill of fare, the orchestra

which played sweet strains during all the meal, were dream-like, almost, to this child of the hills. The elevator seemed to her as something very amusing. She would like to have gone up and down in it several times. She had a charming little room adjoining mine, all done in gray and pink, and an outlook upon the gay street.

She could scarcely tear herself away from the window in the few days that elapsed before I had decided upon a school for her and made some simple preparations. Indeed, I found it rather difficult to decide upon a school for the child, not because there were no good ones, but for the opposite reason that there were so many. But to one thing I made up my mind: she must be out of town. The presence of her father in New York made that a necessity. Yet, on the other hand, I could not send her too far away, as I wanted to see her often, mark her progress and the effect of austere school-life on one who had been accustomed to a free, wild existence on the beautiful Wicklow hills. It was this circumstance which finally determined my choice. I must be in easy distance of the child, so great was my responsibility.

I took her to her new home one evening just as the shadows were deepening and New York lay like a great map traced out in lights. They gleamed and glowed through the gathering darkness, and through the smoke clouds which arose from the countless factories. I felt a curious sense of desolation, and I was certain that Winifred would suffer from this when she found herself enclosed in an unfamiliar building, to become a mere atom, as it were, in a multitude.

The child was grave and quiet, but did not seem to shrink at all from school-life. In fact, she had rather entered into the prospect of going there with the enthusiasm of her age, and had begun to plan out the details of her new existence.

She told me after that she had experienced an awful sense of loneliness when going to bed in a strange dormitory, with its rows of curtained beds, amongst so many whom she had never seen before. During the night prayers and the final hymn she had cried all the time.

These sensations are common enough to all who go into new scenes for the first time; but for some weeks after Winifred's arrival at the convent she reminded me of nothing so much as a bird in a cage. I am sure the ordinary little restraints of school-life must have been intolerable to one brought up, as she had been, unrestrained upon the hills. In the austere convent parlor, with her black dress, and her curls fastened back from her face with a ribbon, she was like a spirit of her former self. She told me, in her quaint speech, that she only lived from one visit of mine to another. Usually she was pale, sad and listless. The spirit of mischief seemed to have gone out of her, and the Religious who presided in the parlor told me that she was docile to her teachers and very diligent in her studies.

"If I study very hard perhaps I will get home sooner," Winifred explained to me as we sat hand in hand in the corner of the parlor. "My heart aches to see Ireland again, and the Dargle and the hills and Granny and Niall and Father Owen, and every one."

"It will not be very long till you see them all again," I observed soothingly. "Time passes very quickly."

She heaved a deep sigh, as if to signify that time did not pass so very quickly for her.

When I rose to go that day I told her that I was going to get permission, if possible, for her to come down and spend a day with me.

"To spend a day with you in the big city down there!"

she cried. "Oh, it will be lovely! We can see so many things and we can talk about home."

That seemed to be indeed her greatest pleasure. The permission was granted, with even better terms than I had expected; for she was to come down on the following Tuesday morning and remain with me till the day after.

"It is a privilege we do not often grant," the nun said, smiling. "But in this child's case we think it is really essential. The change from a widely different life was so very sudden."

"So you are to come on Tuesday, and this is Sunday," I told Winifred.

Her eyes fairly sparkled with delight, as she danced along by my side with something of her old gaiety. "There is only one day between. To-morrow I shall study very hard, and say all my lessons and practise for my singing lesson on Thursday, and do everything well."

I smiled.

"Father Owen would say you should do that every day," I reminded her. "You remember how he pointed out that the robin did his work in storm or sunshine."

"Oh, but 'tis much easier to work in sunshine!" Winifred cried out.

"I suppose it is," laughed I; "but that is no reason why you shouldn't try to do what is harder."

"I do try," Winifred said earnestly. "I get up the moment the bell rings in the morning—though I don't find that as hard as some of the girls do, for I was often out on the hills at sunrise. Then I'm one of the first in the chapel; and in class I study my lessons and I hardly ever talk. At recreation I don't feel much like playing yet, but perhaps I shall after a while—when I know some of the girls better."

"Yes, I am sure you will. How do you like your companions?" I asked.

"I think a good many of them are nice. But it takes me a long time to know strangers, I suppose because I scarcely ever saw any."

"And your teachers?" I inquired.

"Oh, they are all very kind, especially to me, because I come from so far away and have no mother! I like my music teacher best, though. I wish you knew her."

"I must make her acquaintance some time," I remarked; "I want to know all your friends."

"The French teacher is the crossest. She isn't a nun, though, and doesn't wear a nun's dress. She scolds me if I don't know the verbs or if I make mistakes in spelling. I told her the other day that I didn't want a stranger to speak so to me. The girls all laughed, but she didn't understand what I was saying."

"Just as well in that case." And I laughed, picturing to myself the little girl addressing the Frenchwoman with her princess air.

We were standing all this time in the hall, which was not altogether according to rule, as I well knew; for farewells are usually made in the parlor. But I had not the heart to send Winifred away, and the presiding Religious did not appear to notice. I fancy the nuns often strained the rule a little in her regard, taking the circumstances into consideration.

"Good-by till Tuesday!" Winifred called after me, as I stepped out into the porch; "and thank you for all the nice things you have brought me!"

For indeed I never went empty-handed to see the child, remembering my own school-days. I had visited Maillard's that afternoon before taking the cars, and had chosen from

the dainty confections which so temptingly fill the glass cases and adorn the plate-glass windows. I was told that she always distributed my gifts amongst her companions with a royal generosity, often keeping but little for herself. While I was still in the porch I heard her telling a companion:

"I am going to town on Tuesday. Isn't that splendid!"

"Oh, you lucky girl!" said the other. "I wish I had come from Ireland or some other place: then I might get out oftener."

I went homeward, musing on that happy time of life when a day out of school, a promised holiday, gives a keener delight than anything in after life.

"Why does youth ever pass away, with its glow and glory?" I thought. "And how dull its going leaves this prosaic earth!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING.

It was a curious coincidence that on the very Sunday evening after I had visited Winifred and arranged for her to spend Tuesday with me at the hotel, I should have gone to supper with a friend of mine who was also a great friend of Roderick O'Byrne. She was an exceptional woman, of rare gifts, of warm heart and of long purse. She had the social talent in its greatest perfection, and gathered at her house a most brilliant and entertaining circle. She lived in a part of the city which is rapidly becoming old-fashioned—in the once desirable Murray Hill region—and her house was what is known to New Yorkers as an English basement-house: that is to say, the dining-room is on a level with the street, while the drawing-room, or suite of drawing-rooms, is reached by mounting the first stairs. A very handsome suite of rooms had my friend, appointed with the utmost elegance, and containing innumerable souvenirs of travel, artistic trifles of all sorts, with exquisite pictures and priceless statuary, arranged to give the best possible effect.

I had a standing invitation for the Sunday evening suppers, which were an institution of the house, and where one was always sure of meeting very agreeable people. The conversation was usually of everything interesting under the sun. As the guests began to assemble that evening, I saw amongst them, with very mingled feelings, the familiar figure of Roderick O'Byrne. It was my first meeting with him since my return from Ireland, and his presence made me conscious of a curious sensation. I had heard so much of his past

history, the most hidden pages of his life, that it seemed strange to meet him there in an ordinary drawing-room. When I thought of Niall, of the old castle with its romance and mystery, it was hardly credible that this tall and slender gentleman in the well-fitting evening clothes should be the central figure in such a drama. And all the time I was withholding from him such a secret as the presence in America of his only child.

While Roderick stood exchanging a few words with his hostess, I thought all at once of that little scene which Winifred had recalled—when he parted in anger from the lady in the yellow dress, who must have been, of course, his wife. As soon as he saw me he came forward to shake hands, and dropped into a chair at my side. I found a change in him: he seemed more silent and preoccupied than I had ever seen him. However, he was never given to talking commonplaces, and I waited till his mood should change. He sat near me at supper, and on the other side of him was a young and very gushing lady. Roderick seemed amused at her efforts to interest him.

"I have just heard," she exclaimed, "that you are Irish, Mr. O'Byrne; and I am so glad! Our hostess has told me that you are not only from Ireland, but intensely Irish. Now, I think that everything that is intensely Irish is intensely nice."

"Thanks so much!" replied Roderick, carelessly. "I am glad you approve of my nationality; for I have to plead guilty to a very unfashionable love for my country."

"Oh, you needn't plead guilty at all!" cried the charmer. "It is so refreshing nowadays. And you Irish are so delightfully enthusiastic and impressionable, and all that."

Roderick raised his eyebrows ever so slightly.

"By the way," he observed, turning abruptly to me, "I

wonder if you will agree with the sentiment expressed by my neighbor—you who are so lately back from Ireland?"

"'That everything that is intensely Irish is intensely nice'?" I asked. "I am prepared to endorse that sentiment; for I am more Irish than the Irish themselves. I know I have borrowed somebody else's saying; but, really, I have fallen in love with the dear old land. Its hills and glens have got into my heart."

There was a softened look on the man's face and a moisture in his eyes; for he was deeply affected. Presently he said in a low tone:

"Do you know I am very homesick of late? I am pining for a sight of the beautiful hills of the Gilt Spurs and the glorious Dargle. Oh, what would I not give for one good look at the Dargle, glen and river both!"

"Why don't you take a trip to Ireland?" I asked.

"Oh, for many reasons!" he said hurriedly.

He did not go into detail and I could not ask.

"But you will go back some day?" I urged.

"Go back?" he repeated. "I used to think I should: indeed, at one time I longed for the day and hour of my return; and now—"

I wanted to ask the question which rose to my lips, but I dared not; and just then the conversation became general. Our hostess liked to strike sparks from all her guests, and especially from the brilliant Roderick O'Byrne. After we had all returned to the drawing-room he gradually drifted back again to his chair beside me. We had always been friendly, but I knew that my society had a special attraction for him just then, as a link between him and Ireland. He very soon, in fact, reverted to the subject of our previous talk, inquiring as to this or that place near his old home;

though I observed that he never once mentioned any person or persons in the neighborhood. It was evident for some reason that he did not wish to bring Niall into the discourse, and I was just as anxious at the time to avoid that part of the subject.

Suddenly Roderick said:

"I was struck very much the other day by a face which I saw just for a moment."

My heart stood still. I knew what was coming, and I almost dreaded it. But, happily, he did not associate the incident with me.

"It was that of a child," he said, somewhat gravely. "It was a beautiful face, I suppose; but it was not that which specially attracted my attention. I only caught a glimpse—the merest glimpse—of it, but it brought back the past to me as in a flash."

"Strange!" I commented mechanically; for I scarce knew what to say.

"Yes, it was very strange," went on Roderick. "I was standing at the corner of Twenty-third Street, waiting to cross, and it must be owned that I was thinking of anything else than Ireland and my past life there. You know what a crowd there is at that particular place. Suddenly a carriage stood still an instant, delayed by the traffic; and out of it looked that exquisite child-face, full of wonder, of curiosity, and, I thought, of sadness."

I concealed my emotion by an effort; and had he not been so occupied with his subject he might have perceived at once that the story had an unusual interest for me.

"Would you believe," he said, "that New York faded from before me, and instead I saw the Dargle, the glen and the river, with all their lovely surroundings—yes, I saw them

as distinctly as I see you now? The Dargle and—other places about there," he concluded, after a brief pause.

I wondered if he were thinking of the castle.

"By the way," he asked of a sudden, "were you in that part of Ireland at all—I mean Wicklow?"

"Oh, yes!" I said, trying to speak indifferently. "I saw most of the show places there."

"Did you meet any people thereabouts?" he inquired, speaking very slowly and playing with a paper-knife which he had taken up from a neighboring davenport.

It was my turn to hesitate a moment before I replied:

"I met the parish priest, Father Owen, as he is popularly called."

"Father Owen Farley!" exclaimed Roderick, apparently carried away by a sudden burst of enthusiasm; "the dearest, the best, the kindest of men!"

"You know him, then?" I asked.

The glow faded from his face almost at once.

"I was brought up in that part of the country," he said in a reserved way, as if anxious to drop the subject; "so that of course I knew him when I was a boy."

"Well, he certainly is all you say of him," I declared cordially; "he charmed me from the very first."

"Yes, he has an unusually attractive way with him," Roderick said—"or used to have long ago."

And then he dismissed the subject and began to talk of some matter of current interest. However, he very soon reverted to that one topic which seemed to be occupying his thoughts. Waking out of a reverie, he suddenly exclaimed:

"I wish I were a miniature painter, and I should try to put on ivory, just from memory, that exquisite child-face."

"Perhaps you will see her again," I ventured.

"I never expect to," he said decisively. "New York is not Ireland. People are swallowed up here as in a quicksand."

"Life has many surprises," I observed tentatively.

He looked at me keenly for an instant; then he resumed his indifferent air and continued to play with the paper-knife.

"You will think me altogether a dreamer," remarked Roderick, "to be so impressed by a passing face."

I do not know what impelled me to say then:

"Perhaps there was some special reason. Possibly she may have reminded you of some one whom you once knew."

He started; the paper-knife fell from his hands, and he was long in picking it up. But the flash of his dark eyes in that brief moment recalled Niall. The incident was not without its value. I saw my way clear before me. I should gradually try to revive his interest in the past: to forge a chain which should lead him inevitably back to the castle of his ancestors, to Winifred and to his eccentric but devoted kinsman. And at the same time I might chance to discover his motive for so long neglecting his only child.

When Roderick raised his head again, and replaced the paper-knife, with a hand which trembled somewhat, upon the davenport, he said, in a tone of studied carelessness:

"Don't let us talk of this any more. It does seem very absurd. I am half ashamed of having told you anything about it. And there is the professor going to the piano."

During the music Roderick lay back in his chair, and as he listened to the dreamy, soothing sound of the "Songs without Words," I knew that his mind was running on the sweet child-face which had so impressed him, and on the train of associations which that chance meeting had conjured up. I had no further conversation with him on that

occasion, and very soon after I took my leave and went home to ponder over the situation, which I found most interesting. It seemed as if I were holding the thread of a tangled skein, which must sooner or later straighten itself out. I lay awake half the night, picturing to myself Roderick's delight when he should discover that the sweet child-face was that of his own Winifred; and his sorrow, and perhaps remorse, for the past, when he had neglected her. I wondered where and when the disclosure should take place and how it would be brought about. I also resolved to interest Winifred in her father. I could see that she clung much more to the memory of her mother, and seemed to remember Roderick only as the dark gentleman who had got angry with the beautiful lady and slammed the door.

I rose early next morning, for I wanted to go down town. I was going as far as Barclay Street to buy a small statue of the Sacred Heart, which I wished to give Winifred as a present. I was impatient for her coming; for, besides the fact that I was really attached to the child and took a sincere pleasure in her society, I felt a new interest in her since my late conversation with her father.

I looked out the window. There was a drizzling fog. The shops opposite looked dreary and uninviting, and the people who were hastening down Broadway had all the same miserable appearance, looking spectral in the fog. My heart sank. If it were the same kind of weather on the morrow there would be no chance of having Winifred with me. In the first place, she would not be allowed to come; and in the second, there would be very little pleasure in bringing her down from the convent just to spend a few hours shut up in my apartments at the hotel.

I dressed and went out. The streets were glazed over

with a thin coat of frost, which made the walking treacherous and unsafe. The snowfall of two or three days before had entirely disappeared. I picked my way along, making one more in the procession of spectres, till I reached the nearest elevated station, which was in the square at Thirty-third Street, near the *Herald* building. I was soon flying through the air, and in the twinkling of an eye was almost in the heart of the business portion of the great "down-town." Warehouses arose on all sides: from some came a fragrant odor telling of coffee and spices; from others flashed visions of delicate china, rich bronzes, and beautiful glassware. And finally I was set down within a block or so of my destination.

I picked my way carefully along the narrow lane-like street, and emerged just opposite old St. Peter's, the mother-church of New York. Its somber walls looked gray and dismal in that dreary fog; but within it was warm and cheerful, and imposing in a massive, old-fashioned way. I prayed earnestly for the success of all our scheming—that is, Niall's and mine; and, above all, for the happy reunion of father and daughter.

After that I went out again to purchase my statue. I was now in the region of the Catholic publishers, which is full of many memories of other days and the various phases of Catholic life in New York. There much has been done for the Catholic cause; much has been discussed, much has been attempted, and many attempts have failed. It is historic ground. I bought my statue and hurried home, glad to be housed on that chilly and disagreeable day. I had a few other preparations to make, on the chance that the weather would clear up; but I resolved to leave them till the morning, when they might be easily accomplished by the aid of the telephone.

CHAPTER XIX.

WINIFRED GOES SIGHT-SEEING.

THE next morning I woke earlier than usual; and, getting up at once, looked out of the window. Every trace of the fog had vanished, and there was the sun leaping and dancing as merrily as if it were midsummer instead of December. I hurried off to Mass, and got back again, to take a hasty breakfast and sit down in my room to wait for Winifred. It was about ten o'clock when, with my eyes glued to the window, I saw her little face looking out of the carriage which I had sent for her. I ran down to the ladies' entrance to bring her in. She looked brighter and better than I had seen her since she left Ireland. She wore her black school costume, but her hair was no longer brushed painfully down to comparative smoothness: it broke out into the same saucy curls I knew of old. She darted out of the carriage and in at the open door, throwing herself into my arms.

"Here I am!" she cried. "And so glad to see you again!"

"I began to be afraid yesterday," I observed, "that we were both going to be disappointed."

"Oh, so was I!" said Winifred. "I went to the window the first thing, to be sure that the sun was shining and the fog gone away."

"So did I. But there couldn't have been much sun at the time you got up."

"Oh, it was there! And I saw there wasn't any fog and that it was going to be a fine day."

I brought her up to my room and installed her in a chair to rest while I got on my things.

"For of course we must go out as soon as we can," I declared. "It will never do to miss a moment of such a perfect day, and it will be all too short."

A shade seemed to pass over Winifred's sensitive face at the words. But I called her attention to the street below; for Broadway on a sunshiny morning is a very pleasant and cheerful sight, and to Winifred it was all new; so that it was certain the constant panorama of human beings, all jostling one another, eager, excited, apparently in a fearful hurry, would keep her fully occupied while I completed my toilet. Once the child called me to the window to see a Chinaman. She had never seen one before, and she went off into a peal of laughter at the odd sight. This particular John was dressed in a pale blue silk shirt over his baggy black trousers. His pigtail was long and luxuriant, denoting rank.

"What is he?" cried Winifred. "You have such funny people in America. I don't think there are any like him in all Ireland."

"Not in Wicklow, at any rate," I answered. "Indeed, I don't know what they would think of him there. He looks as if he had just stepped off a tea-caddy, straight from China."

"Oh, he is a Chinese, then! I never saw one before except in pictures."

The next thing that attracted her attention was one of the great vans, drawn by enormous dray-horses.

"Look at their big legs and feet!" laughed Winifred—"as big as a tree almost! Oh, I wish Barney and Moira could see them!"

The ladies' dresses, too, astonished her—especially of those who drove in the carriages; for she had never seen such costumes before.

At last I was ready, and we passed down the stairway, with its heavy piled moquette carpet, to the street without. Just across the way was a florist's, and I told Winifred we should make our first visit there. We had to wait a favorable moment for crossing Broadway. The child was naturally fearless, but she was somewhat afraid of the multitude of vehicles—cars, carts, and private carriages—which formed a dense mass between the two sidewalks.

"Yet crossing the street up here is nothing," I said. "Wait till you try it some day down on lower Broadway—at Wall Street, for instance, or near the City Hall Park."

"This is bad enough!" cried Winifred. "You feel as if some of the horses must step on you."

However, we got safely across, with the aid of a tall policeman, who piloted us through the crowd, putting up an authoritative hand to stop a horse here, or signing to a driver there to give place. We entered the florist's shop. It was like going from winter to a lovely spring day. The fragrance from the many flowers was exquisite but almost overpowering. Masses of roses, of carnations, of chrysanthemums were there in the rarest profusion; flowering plants, palms, costly exotics, made the place seem like some tropical garden under Southern skies. The sight of the violets brought the tears to Winifred's eyes: they reminded her of her home beyond the sea. But when she heard the price of them she was amazed.

"Why, we get them for nothing in the Dargle—as many as we want—coming on the spring," she whispered. "Don't give so much money for them."

She persisted so much in the idea that it would be fearful

to waste money on flowers which might be had at home for nothing, that I bought her roses instead. I made her select a bunch for herself from the mass. She was charmed with their variety of color, varying from the pale yellow of the tea-rose to the deepest crimson. We recrossed the street, and I made her go back to the hotel with the roses, so that they might keep fresh in water. When she came down again to where I was waiting on the sidewalk, I said:

"Now there is going to be a circus procession on Fifth Avenue. It is just about time for it; so we will go round the corner and see it."

"What is a circus procession?" she inquired gravely.

"You shall see for yourself in a few minutes," I answered briefly.

We went across Twenty-ninth Street to Fifth Avenue, and stationed ourselves on a high brownstone stoop, which, fortunately for us, was not yet crowded. All along the streets people were waiting in serried rows. Small boys were mounted on trees, calling out jeering exclamations to those below; fruit venders and venders of peanuts elbowed their way about, or stood on corners with furnaces aglow for the roasting of chestnuts. It was a busy, animated scene; while the cheerful laughter and the shrill, gleeful voices of the children added to the general mirth.

Presently the arrival of the procession was announced by the small boys and the blowing of a bugle by a man on horseback. The first to appear was a train of magnificent horses, some with Arab riders, some controlled by wonderfully dexterous women. Next in order was a beautiful lady, clad in a gorgeous, bespangled costume, seated in a gilt chariot and driving with the utmost skill six snow-white horses.

"A gold carriage!" whispered Winifred, awestricken. "Oh, if Barney and Moira could only see that!"

"All is not gold that glitters," I replied promptly. "But the white horses are certainly beautiful."

"Oh, what are these?" she asked.

I looked. It was the camels that had attracted the child's attention. Their appearance so astonished and amused her that she went off into peals of merry laughter, which caused many a responsive smile around us.

"What funny things you have in America!" she exclaimed. "Just see how these things walk and the queer men on their backs."

"The animals are called camels," I said; "and their drivers are supposed to be Arabs from the desert."

"Oh, I have studied about the camels and the deserts!" Winifred said, and she looked at them with new interest.

Her astonishment reached its climax when she saw the elephants.

"What are they at all?" she cried, gazing at their enormous bulk with startled eyes, as they slowly plodded on. Her glance wandered from their trunks to their great legs and huge sides. I told her what they were, and I think her studies had supplied her with some information about them and the ivory which is obtained from their tusks.

She was charmed with the monkeys.

"I'm sure they're little old men," she said—"just like those Niall used to tell about, who were shut up in the hills."

She was never tired of watching their antics, and only regretted when they were out of sight. Two or three of them were mounted on tiny ponies; and, to Winifred's great glee, one tumbled ignominiously off and had to be picked up out of the mud by an attendant.

"What's coming now?" she cried, as one of the vans containing a lion hove into sight. The great beast lay tranquil and unmoved, gazing at the passers-by with that air of nobility which always belongs to his species. His appearance seemed to fascinate my companion and she gazed at him very earnestly.

"That is a lion," I remarked.

"Oh, the king of the forest!" put in Winifred. "He looks like a king."

"A very fierce one at times," I replied. "But that next is a tiger—a far more cruel and treacherous beast."

"I don't like him," said Winifred, decisively; "although he is something like a big, big cat, only for the stripes on his back."

The leopards next passed by, fidgeting up and down the cage, with their spotted coats glittering in the sun. Hyenas, wolves, foxes, jackals, passed in quick succession, giving place at last to a giraffe. I pointed this animal out to Winifred.

"He has a long, long neck," she observed; "he looks as if he had stretched it out so far that he couldn't get it back again."

The doings of the clown, I think, puzzled more than they amused Winifred.

"Is he a man or another kind of animal?" she asked me gravely. She was not at all sure what kind of being he was, or why he should be so dressed up and act in such a manner. I told her that it was to amuse people.

"But he isn't half so funny as the monkeys," she declared, contemptuously. "Why, you never told me that there were such wonderful things in America!"

"I'm sure I never thought of it," I replied, laughing. "But I am glad you have seen the circus. It is quite an

education in natural history. Now you will know an elephant from a giraffe, a lion from a tiger, a camel from a zebra, and a monkey from a fox. But, dear, we must hurry on and see what sight-seeing we can do. I declare it is almost noon already."

Presently, indeed, we heard the shrill sound of many whistles and the ringing of more than one bell.

Winifred put her hands to her ears.

"What a noise!" she cried; and she laughed merrily as she did so, her feet fairly dancing over the pavement in the pleasant sunlight of that winter day. And so we pursued our way up Fifth Avenue, with its rows of imposing brownstone houses, toward the cathedral, which was our destination.

CHAPTER XX.

ANOTHER UNEXPECTED MEETING.

COMING to the cathedral, where it stands on the corner of Fiftieth Street and Fifth Avenue, we stopped to observe its proportions, at once noble and graceful, its white marble façade and tall spires being one of the ornaments of the Empire City. Entering the edifice, we knelt a while in prayer before we began to examine all its beauties in detail. The rich glow of the beautiful stained windows was a revelation to the child, and the stories which they tell of saints and martyrs appealed to her strongly. She watched their varied tints falling upon the marble altars with a visible delight.

"I must write a letter about this to Father Owen," she said as we came out again upon the dignified bustle of Fifth Avenue, so unlike the activity of Broadway, but still noticeable after the quiet of the great temple. "It is all so grand in there!" she said—"grand as our own mountains and beautiful as the Dargle. It reminded me of heaven. Perhaps heaven is something like that."

I smiled and did not contradict her; for the calm and repose of a great cathedral is very far removed indeed from earth.

"Of course there are several other churches I want you to see," I observed; "but perhaps that one will do now. As we had breakfast late, and are not in a particular hurry for our luncheon, I think we will take a trip in an elevated car first."

Winifred, of course, consented eagerly; and, having procured the child a cup of hot bouillon at a druggist's as a preventive against hunger, we climbed up the great iron stairs of the elevated station at Fourteenth Street and Sixth Avenue, and were soon seated in the car.

It seemed very wonderful to Winifred that we should be flying through the air at such a rate of speed; but she was delighted with the swift motion and had no thought of fear. She keept looking in with eager curiosity at the houses or the shops as we passed by their second- or third-story windows, and down at the pigmy-like people on the sidewalk, making continual exclamations of wonder or interest.

We got out at the Battery; and before taking the East Side car up town I let Winifred take a run in Battery Park, so that she might have a glimpse of the bay and the huge ferry-boats landing their loads of passengers, and the funnels of the steamers or the masts of tall vessels in the offing.

"Across all that water," she cried, stretching out her arms with a pretty and graceful gesture, "is my home—my dear hills, the Dargle, and the people that I love!"

She sniffed the salt air as though it were wine; and ran about in the alleys, gazing longingly at the green grass, while I sat upon a bench and waited. At last I reminded her that time was flying, and that she would be a very hungry little girl by the time we made our trip up the East Side of the city and got down again to luncheon.

We were soon seated in a Third Avenue elevated car and passed up Chatham Square and the Bowery—that great thoroughfare, where such curious people congregate; where the very shops have a different air, and the oyster-saloons and other places of refreshment seem to revel in strange sign-boards and queerly-worded advertisements. The Jews are

there in large numbers, as also Syrians, Chinese, and other Orientals, so that it has a strange and foreign air.

It all amused and interested Winifred, and she called my attention every now and again to some grotesque figure on the sign-boards or to some poster on the wall. I pointed out to the child Stuyvesant Park and Union Square Park as a rest to the eyes tired with so much sight-seeing. Then we jogged up the uninteresting and uninviting Third Avenue till finally we were in the vicinity of Harlem Bridge and away up in the open country, past Harlem and Mott Haven, and well up toward High Bridge itself.

At last I called a halt, and we alighted and began the descent again. I resolved to take the little girl to luncheon at the Waldorf as a special treat, so that she might see modern luxury, so far as hotels are concerned, at its height. We sat in the Empire dining-room, with the imperial eagle of the great Napoleon on our chair-backs and a large bunch of fragrant pink roses on the table before us. Our soup was brought in small silver bowls, which reminded Winifred of Niall's treasures. She much enjoyed the very choice and daintily served luncheon which I ordered for her, particularly the sweet course and the dessert. An orchestra was playing all the time of luncheon, changing briskly from grave to gay; and its strains helped to make the whole scene dreamlike and unreal to the child of Nature, accustomed only to the glory of the hills.

Other wonders awaited her: the *café,* with its ever-blossoming trees, and the goldfish swimming in its ponds; the onyx stairway, and the Louis Quinze salon, with its inlaid cabinets, its brocaded furniture, and above all its gilt piano. This last object seemed to cap the climax of splendor in Winifred's eyes. I think, indeed, that very modern hotel seemed

to her a page from the Arabian Nights—some Aladdin's palace which the genii had built up. She was very pleased, too, with the private dining-room upstairs, where the turning on of the electric light showed such a display of china of all sorts.

When we were tired of exploring, and had, in fact, seen all that was really worth the trouble or that was open to the public, I sat down at a table in the Turkish parlor to write a note, bidding Winifred rest a while. She coiled herself up in one of the great armchairs, keeping so still that I almost thought she had gone to sleep.

The rugs in that room are very soft and the draperies ample, and sound is very much deadened, so that I did not perceive any one coming in. Looking up suddenly from my writing, I was surprised to see Roderick O'Byrne. I grew pale and red by turns; my heart sank within me and I could not meet his glance. I thought of Niall, his anger, his threats, my own promises. Yet what was I to do in such a situation? Unconscious, of course, of the tumult he had raised in my mind, Roderick came directly toward me, making a few indifferent remarks on the weather, the last political event, the hotel. Finally he asked, abruptly:

"By the way, do I remember aright, that you said you were in Wicklow during your recent trip to Ireland?"

"Yes—no!" I cried, confused. "Oh, yes, of course I was there!"

He looked at me in some surprise; then he asked again:

"Of course you saw the Sugar Loaf Mountains, as the Sassenach call them, but which we Celts loved to name the Gilt Spurs?"

"Of course," I assented, more uneasily than ever; for I heard a movement in the chair.

"The Dargle goes without saying," he continued.

Another rustle in the chair.

"But I am not going to put you through a catechism on Irish local scenery," Roderick said, with a laugh; "I am almost sure you told me that you knew Father Owen Farley."

"Oh, my dear, dear Father Owen!" cried Winifred from the depth of her chair. The mention of that beloved name had aroused her from the spell of shyness, or some other cause, which had hitherto kept her silent.

Roderick turned quickly, and at the same moment Winifred stood up and faced him. There they were together, father and daughter, as any one could see at a glance.

"Do you know Father Owen, sir?" the child asked; and at her voice Roderick started. He did not answer her question, but, gazing at her intently, asked instead:

"Who are you, child?"

Something in the question abashed or offended Winifred; for she drew her little figure to its highest and replied not a word.

Roderick smiled involuntarily at the movement; and I, stepping forward, interposed myself between the father and daughter and drew the child away.

"Come!" I said: "we are in a hurry." And, with a bow and a few muttered words of farewell, I hastened out of the room; and, rushing from the hotel as if a plague had suddenly broken out there, I almost ran with the wondering Winifred to Broadway, where we took a cable car as the safest and speediest means of leaving that vicinity behind us. I had left the note which I was writing on the table; but, fortunately, I had sealed and stamped it, intending to put it in the mail-box in the hall. I was sure it would be posted, and gave myself no further concern about it.

I knew Roderick would come to me sooner or later for an explanation of that strange scene—the presence there of the child and my own singular conduct. His impetuous nature would give him no rest till he had cleared up that mystery. But at least the child should be safe back in the convent before I saw him; and I could then refuse to answer any questions, or take any course I thought proper, without fear of interference on the part of Winifred.

"We shall go on up to the Park," I said to the child; for I had some fear that Roderick might come straight to my hotel.

Winifred made no answer, and we took the car to Fifty-ninth Street, where we got out and were soon strolling through the broad alleys, thronged with carriages; or the quieter foot-paths of that splendid Central Park, justly the pride of New Yorkers.

"Why are you afraid of that gentleman?" Winifred asked me in her abrupt fashion as I led her by a secluded path to show her a statue of Auld Lang Syne which had always appealed to me.

"I am not afraid of him, dear."

"But why are you trembling, and why did you run away?" she asked again.

"Because it was time for us to go. I still have much to show you."

"I like that gentleman," she said.

"Do you?" I cried impulsively. "I am so glad! Go on liking him just as much as ever you can."

She did not seem so much surprised at this statement and at my apparent inconsistency as a grown person would have been; but she went on:

"Only I thought it was rather rude of him to question me like that."

"He did not mean it for rudeness."

"No, I suppose not," the child said slowly. "I'm sorry you took me away so quickly. I would like to have talked to him. He reminded me of Niall."

"Of Niall!" I repeated in amazement.

"Yes," she answered. "Of course he hasn't gray hair and he doesn't wear the same kind of clothes that Niall does, but it's his face."

I remembered how the same thought had on one occasion occurred to me.

"Then I think he knew my dear Father Owen," the child continued. "I wonder how he knew him? Father Owen never came to America."

"Perhaps he heard of him," I suggested; for I was not anxious that her curiosity in the subject should be too keenly aroused. I tried to divert her mind by showing her various monuments and busts of celebrated people as we went, and at last we stood before the stone group of Auld Lang Syne. It is so natural, so easy, so lifelike that one would think it represented three old men, boon companions, whom we had known. The very buttons on their surtouts, the smile upon their faces, are to the life. Winifred stood by, smiling responsively, while I recited to her the familiar lines of that homely ballad which has found an echo in every land.

We could not see everything in the Park that day, especially as we began to feel tired. So, leaving the rest for a future occasion, we returned home again and had a rest before dinner. The gaily-lighted dining-room, the well-dressed guests, were a new source of pleasure to Winifred; but every once in a while her thoughts reverted to the dark gentleman. I was haunted by a fear that he would come that very evening for an explanation, and I did not linger either in the hotel

parlors or the corridor. But the evening wore away and there was no sign of him. I took Winifred out to show her a little of New York by gaslight, and to-lay in a stock of chocolates and other sweets for her to take back with her on the morrow.

Next day, faithful to promise, I brought her back to school, where I left her somewhat depressed and despondent, as the returning pupil is apt to be for a day or two. Then I set myself to await Roderick's visit with what heart I might.

CHAPTER XXI.

A MYSTERY SOLVED.

WHEN Winifred had returned to the convent, I waited patiently for Roderick's coming, which I knew could not be long delayed. Indeed, before the week was out his card was brought to me where I sat at my sitting-room fire. I glanced up at him as he entered the room. His face was grave, even stern in its expression, reminding me forcibly of Niall. After the ordinary salutations had been exchanged, he stood before me silent a moment; then he said, with an abruptness quite foreign to his manner:

"I think you will agree with me that this is no time for commonplaces. I have come to know the meaning of this mystery."

"Mystery!" I repeated vaguely; for, with all my planning and thinking what I should say when he came, I was still hopelessly at a loss, and resolved to be guided by the event.

"Yes, mystery," he declared emphatically. "I saw in your company the very child of whom I told you I had had a glimpse and whom I was so eager to see again."

"But how could I know that the child with me was the one who had attracted your attention?"

"Well, in the first place," he answered, looking at me keenly, "I gave you a tolerably accurate description of the girl in question. The type is not a very common one, and might, I think be easily recognized."

He paused; and I remaining silent, he went on again:

"I hope you will not consider it rude if I say that I think you did know it was the child I was in search of."

"And why?" I asked, still with a mere helpless idea of gaining time.

"Because of your manner and your course of action the other day in the parlor of the Waldorf. I saw at once that, for some reason or another, you were disturbed at my presence there. When the girl spoke and thus attracted my attention, you were distressed; and while I was in the act of addressing her you seized her by the hand and fled from the hotel." (An irrepressible smile came over his face at the recollection.) "You left in such haste that you forgot the letter you had been writing. However, I posted that for you. And you went along Thirty-third Street, I should be afraid to say at what rate of speed. Did you suppose I was going to pursue you and forcibly wrest away the child?"

I could not help laughing in sympathy at the drollery which shone out through the anxiety of his face, like sunshine from a cloud.

"Well, not exactly," I observed; "but, truth to tell, I had no desire to hold any conversation with you just then. And, besides, I was in a hurry."

"Oh, you *were* in a hurry—there was no possible doubt about that!" he assented, still laughing.

"Will you not sit down?" I inquired. "You look so very unsociable standing, and the night is cold enough to make this fire agreeable."

He took the chair I indicated, but he did not turn from the subject.

"May I ask," he resumed, "if the child whom I saw on that occasion is here with you?"

"She is not," I responded briefly, elated that I could do so truthfully.

"Where is she?"

"That I can not tell."

"Can not tell!" he repeated musingly. "Surely that is a very strange answer. Perhaps, at least, you will tell me *who* she is?"

"I am not at liberty to tell that either," I replied firmly.

"Mystery on mystery!" he cried, with an impatient gesture. "What in the name of common-sense—if you will forgive my bluntness—is the purpose of this mystification?"

"The mystification arises," I declared, "from the fact that I am solemnly pledged to keep both her identity and her whereabouts a secret."

"From whom?"

The question was a shrewd one. I hesitated how to answer it; but at last I said:

"From all inquirers."

"Are there likely to be many?" he asked, quizzically.

"That I can not say."

Roderick lay back in his chair and pondered, keeping his eyes fixed upon my face.

"Under ordinary circumstances," he said, after a pause, "I should, of course, respect your desire for secrecy and say no more about the matter. But there are reasons which make the identity of this child of vital interest to me."

I could not answer: there was now nothing I could say without revealing the secret I was pledged to keep.

"You will pardon me for saying further that I strongly suspect *I* am the person toward whom you are pledged to maintain this secrecy."

"You!" I repeated. "Why, surely you are in a singular mood to-night, full of fancies and suspicions!"

"For which I have good and sufficient reasons. Are yours equally so for maintaining this secrecy?"

"I believe that they are," I replied gravely.

He rose and paced the floor a while. Then he sat down again, and drew his chair nearer mine, as if impelled by some sudden resolve.

"Since you will not give me your confidence—" he began.

"Since I can not," I corrected quietly.

"Well, since you can not or will not, I shall give you mine instead, and open for your inspection a page of my life which I fancied was closed forever."

He paused, and an expression so sad and troubled crossed his face that, in my deep pity, I almost regretted my promise to Niall.

"I was brought up," he went on, "in the neighborhood of the Dargle. That beautiful glen and stream were alike familiar to me. I inhabited an old family mansion, which, to say the least, stood sadly in need of repair. I was under the guardianship of a kinsman who, though eccentric, was of sterling worth."

There was a touch of emotion in his voice, as he thus referred to Niall, which pleased me.

"When I was about twenty-three we had a serious difference of opinion, which arose in part from my marriage. For at that time I married a very beautiful girl, who lived only a few years, and left one child—a girl."

He hurried over this part of the story, which seemed deeply painful to him.

"It is always unpleasant to go into family affairs, but my relations with my wife's family were such that I removed the child from their influence and took her back to the old dwelling. There I placed her in charge of an old woman who

had been my nurse. I refused to accept any of my wife's money, even for the maintenance of the child; and, my own circumstances being not of the best, I came to America. I had but one object in view—to make money, that I might return, claim my child and restore the old dwelling of my fathers to something of its former state."

Again there was a long, troubled pause; and I did not interrupt him by so much as a word, nor did I give any sign that some of his story was already familiar to me. When he resumed it was in a different tone. His face was drawn and haggard, his voice tremulous:

"For some time I sent the half-yearly remittance faithfully to my little Winifred, and I was happy in so doing. Then I received a letter—from whom precisely I know not, though I believe it purported to be from a priest. It was written in the third person and it simply informed me that my child was dead."

"Dead!" I exclaimed—"dead! How cruel!—how—"

I was about to say untrue, but I checked myself in time. Roderick glanced quickly toward me but said nothing.

"It was indeed a cruel blow," he resumed at last; "and after that I gave up all desire to see Ireland again. I drifted on here, doing whatever good I could and working still, but with little personal hope or interest to cheer me in my labors."

His weary, despondent tone went to my heart, which was beating just then with exultation; for I was truly rejoiced to know that Winifred's father was worthy of her, that poor Niall's dreams might one day come true—at least in so far as seeing the reunion of father and child, with Roderick's return to the home of his youth. I resolved to write to Niall without delay, tell him of what I had discovered and obtain his permission to reveal all to Roderick. In the meantime,

however, I must, of course, be true to my promise and give Roderick no hint of the knowledge I possessed.

"And you never found out from whom that letter came?" I inquired.

"Never: there was no means of finding out. Father Owen was at that time absent in Rome. I presumed it was from the priest who had replaced him. I wrote to him; the letter followed him to a distant parish in a remote part of Ireland, whither he had already returned. He had never written to me, he replied, and had no knowledge of the matter at all. I wrote to Granny Meehan, the woman who had charge of Winifred. She never answered. I suppose on the death of the child she had wandered away. I then sent a letter to Niall, the eccentric kinsman to whom I before referred. He, I suppose, was either dead or away on some of his wanderings."

"Your story is indeed a sad one," I put in, grieved that I could do nothing to dispel his sorrow. I could not let him know that Granny Meehan was still faithful to her post, that Niall was still dreaming and planning for his welfare and for the restoration of the old place; and that, best of all, Winifred was still living and such a child as might delight a father's heart—in fact, that she was the child who had so deeply interested him already. Whether he suspected that such was the case or merely saw in her some chance resemblance I could not yet tell.

"You may well say it is a sad story," Roderick answered. "To me it seems all the more so that since the receipt of that letter which dashed all my hopes Fortune has smiled upon me. Everything I touch seems to turn to money. The novel, rejected before, has since been accepted, and has run through several editions; articles from my pen are in demand

by leading magazines; all my speculations have turned out well, and my insurance business has prospered. It is the old, old story of Fortune coming too late."

I sat still, joyful, yet amazed; thinking within myself:

"How wonderful are the ways of Providence! Niall's dream of restoring the old place shall certainly be realized now. Father and child, reunited, shall dwell amongst those lovely scenes; while the faithful hearts of Niall and Granny Meehan shall be filled with joy. How seldom does life work out events so happily!"

"Would you like to see the old place again?" I asked.

"What use now?" he cried. "Some day I may take the journey to see if Niall be still amongst the living; but I shrink from that as yet."

We sat silent after that for some moments, I afraid to break the spell lest I should in any way betray the knowledge which so filled my heart. But presently Roderick roused himself with the remark:

"That child whom I first saw in the carriage on Broadway, and whom I next saw in your company, has awakened a strange train of thought in my mind. I have even dared to hope that I have been the victim of a trick and that my child still lives. Her voice, when she spoke in the Waldorf parlor the other day, seemed as an echo of my vanished youth. It was the voice of my wife; and when the child rose from the chair and confronted me, for an instant I believed that the grave had given up its dead. It was my wife herself as I saw her first, many years before our marriage."

"Resemblances are very delusive," I said lamely.

"But was *this* resemblance delusive?" he asked, leaning forward and looking me in the face.

"How can I answer? I never saw your wife," I replied.

It was an evasion, and perhaps he saw it; but he only sighed deeply.

"I had expected better things of you," he went on; "for we are old enough friends that I might have looked to you for help in clearing up a mystery. As it is, you will not or can not; and I must drag on in the same weary, hapless fashion or follow out the clue for myself. Indeed, I trust you will think it no discourtesy when I tell you that I *must* and *will* find out who this child is."

His resemblance to Niall was once more almost startling; though, needless to observe, there was no wildness nor violence of any sort in his manner.

"I wish I were able to give you the information you desire," I said formally. "But at present it is impossible."

He rose to take his leave.

"In that case I must not intrude upon you any longer," he answered coldly. "I am afraid I have been thoughtless in occupying so much of your time with my personal affairs."

I felt at that moment that a valued friendship of many years was endangered, but I could not be false to my trust. Niall must hear all, and then it would be for him to act. I held out my hand. Roderick took it but there was no warmth in the handshake; and as he disappeared down the corridor, I stood looking after him sadly, fully realizing that for the time being I had lost much in his estimation. Yet I hoped to be able to repair all and explain all in good time.

I did not lose a moment in getting out my writing-desk and writing to Niall a full account of all that I had heard. My pen moved rapidly and joyfully over the page. I had so much to tell! Roderick still true to his child, his kinsman, and his old home; Roderick having acquired wealth which

he would be only too happy to spend in fulfilling the old man's dream. I also wrote to Father Farley and begged him to let Granny Meehan know the good news as speedily as possible. How I wished that I could fly over the ocean and be myself the bearer of those good tidings! I fancied the patient old face of Granny brightening, and the loving, tender voice giving forth thanks to her Creator.

The scene rose so vividly before me that I sat back in my chair, with pen uplifted, to ponder it over. There was the hearth in the great kitchen, near which Granny Meehan sat. A fire was burning there—a clear peat fire; beside it the tranquil figure of the blind woman, with the cat, Brown Peter, purring against her dress; and Barney and Moira in the background, hanging about to hear the great news which good Father Owen had to tell. And I conjured up the fine face of the priest beaming with the glad tidings; and I seemed to hear once more his genial voice reading aloud the welcome letter from America.

I returned to my task and wrote on, while the clock on my mantel tolled out eleven, and the din of the street below began to give place to the silence of night. I had a curious impression that Winifred stood beside me as I wrote, her image seemed so very vivid. I resolved to go to see her on the morrow, which was Thursday—visiting-day at the convent. But I knew it would be another trial to refrain from telling her of her father and of the mystery concerning him which had just been cleared up. My original intention of striving to kindle her affection and admiration for the father she scarcely remembered was strengthened by the knowledge I had gained. Knowing her father to be entirely worthy of her love and to be devotedly attached to her, I could with a clear conscience describe him as he really was, and clothe

the phantom she remembered with the lovable attributes of the real man.

My letters finished, I rang for a bell-boy, and had them posted at once; for it seemed to me that they would never get over to Ireland, and that I would never have an answer back again. Then I stood for a moment at the window and looked out at the still brightly lighted streets, where the passers-by were fewer; though many still hurried to and fro from the theatres, concerts, or lectures—all intent on business or pleasure. Carriages swept by, cars with belated passengers in them still ran, and the hum of the great city was audible from afar even at that late hour.

CHAPTER XXII.

AT THE CONVENT.

I WENT up to see Winifred next day, and, in the light of my new discoveries, to talk with her over past, present, and future. She came into the dimly-lighted convent parlor with something of her former brightness. Her little figure was particularly graceful and symmetrical in the somber black of the costume. An attempt had been made to brush her curls as smooth as the regulations required, but they still broke out mutinously; her eyes shone; while her complexion, though paler than before, was clear and healthful. All present in the parlor—for it was visiting-day—turned to look at her, and I heard more than one whispered inquiry concerning her in the groups that sat around.

I inquired first about her school-life—her lessons and all those little details of convent life familiar to girls who have ever been at boarding-school.

"I am singing in the choir now," she told me; "and I like that very much. Did you ever sing in a choir when you were little?"

"No," I answered; "for the best of all reasons, that I had no voice."

"Well, we practise a great deal," she went on; "and that is always nice. I think my voice sounded best on the hills. Do you remember when I used to sit on the tree over the Dargle? Well, I could raise my voice very high then."

"I remember well," I replied; "and those old ballads you

sang suited your voice. But I am glad you are getting interested in the choir and in your singing lessons."

"Yes, and some of my other lessons I like very much. And, then, we are to have a play, in which I am to take the part of an Indian."

"You ought to do that well," I remarked, "because you have lived so much in the open air."

I thought as I spoke that she had indeed the free, wild grace of movement peculiar to the children of Nature.

"That's what Sister said when she gave me the part," Winifred assented. "It is great fun being an Indian. I have to wear feathers on my head and some paint on my face, and a beaded skirt and a blanket embroidered with quills and things. Wouldn't Barney and Moira stare if they saw me!"

And she laughed at the picture she conjured up of their amazement.

"Granny Meehan would stare too, were it possible for her to see you," I observed; "though that she could not do even if you stood before her."

"Poor old Granny!" Winifred said softly. "I wish I could see her. But there's no use wishing."

And she dismissed the subject with that curiously unchild-like composure and self-control which I had often perceived in her.

"Winifred," I finally asked, "do you remember your father at all?"

She looked startled, but answered:

"I suppose it was he who shut the door hard when the lady in yellow made him angry."

"Yes," I said: "I suppose it was."

"He was very dark," Winifred went on, thoughtfully. "I think it was the same one who took me away. He was

dressed all in black and he looked very sad. He took me by the hand and we went out of the house and through some streets, and then he put me before him on a horse and rode off. He was very kind and not at all angry that day."

"They say he is living, Winifred my child," I ventured. "Would you like to see him again?"

"Oh, yes!" she cried; "though perhaps he would be like a stranger; it is so very long ago."

"Niall believes you will see him yet," I continued; "so you ought to get accustomed to the idea. I used to know him, and he was noble and good and kind-hearted."

"You never told me before that you knew him," Winifred remarked, looking at me curiously.

"And yet I did, and he was all that I have said," I declared.

"But he does not care for me," said Winifred suddenly, "or he would not have gone away and left me."

I was startled and at the same time touched by the deep sadness of her tone.

"Perhaps he thought you were dead," I suggested.

"Thought I was dead!" repeated Winifred, in surprise.

Then she burst into a peal of laughter.

"Winifred," I cried, bending toward her, "think that—think anything rather than that your father has forgotten you or does not care for you."

The tears came into her eyes, but she suddenly turned away from the subject, as she usually did when deeply moved—a habit which she had in common with her father.

"You never saw my classroom, did you?" she inquired.

I answered that I had not.

"Then I will ask if I may take you up to see it," she said, darting away for the desired permission.

We went up the great, broad stairs and along the shining corridor to a room with a half glass door and a pair of broad, low windows. Within it were rows of desks familiar to all convent girls, and a desk for the teacher standing upon a raised platform. There was a small statue of the Sacred Heart and one of the Blessed Virgin resting upon brackets, with flowers before them; and a fine engraving or two of sacred subjects hung with the maps upon the walls. An immense blackboard occupied one side of the apartment. The room was empty as regarded occupants; and Winifred, dancing across the floor to one of the desks which stood near the window, cried:

"This is mine!"

I went and sat down on the chair, fastened securely to the floor, which looked out upon the wintry landscape. At that moment a bird came chirping and twittering about the window-sill, and cocking his bright little eye as he looked in at us through the pane.

"He comes very often," said Winifred, regarding the little brown object with a kindly glance. "Sometimes I feed him with crumbs. He always reminds me of Father Owen's robin far away over the sea, and I wonder if he will ever fly so far."

I laughed at the idea.

"Perhaps he may go and take a message to that other bird," I suggested.

"Not until the spring, anyway," Winifred answered gravely. "But when I see him out there on cold, stormy days I think how Father Owen said that the robin did his work in storm or calm and tried to sing and be merry."

"And I suppose you try to imitate him?" I put in.

"Yes," she said, "I think I do; but I'm not always merry

in the storm, and my teacher tells me I'm too wayward and unstable: that I'm never two days the same."

I said nothing, and she went on:

"All my life people have told me that I'm wayward. I used to be called Wayward Winifred. Perhaps it's from living so much on the hills; for you know they change often. Sometimes they're beautiful, with the sun shining like gold on their heads; and again they're dark and threatening."

"Like Niall," I added.

"Don't say anything against Niall—O poor, poor Niall!" she interrupted, almost vehemently.

"Well, that is not exactly against him. But he is rather variable," I declared. "But now you are in a place where everything is the same day after day."

"I found that hard at first," Winifred said—"very hard; but now I don't mind so much. And I suppose if I stay long enough, I shall come to be always the same too."

Inwardly I doubted if such a result were possible, but I did not tell her that. I asked her to show me what was in her desk, and she began to take out, one by one, pencils, pens, colored crayons, exercise books, a slate, a pile of lesson books. She had also her beads and her prayer-book in there. The latter contained some very pretty lace pictures, given her by her teachers as rewards of merit, on her birthday or some other festal occasion. One of the pictures, however, she took from between the leaves of the book and handed it to me.

"Do you remember the day Father Owen gave me that?" she asked.

"Was that the one he told you to get out of his breviary?" I inquired.

"Yes," answered Winifred; "and it was on the day that you told me you were going to bring me to America."

"Yes, it was that memorable day."

"I hated you then—oh, so much!" cried Winifred; "and I thought I should always go on hating you, till we went into the church and Father Owen began to play the organ."

"Music has charms," I quoted, "to soothe—well, I won't say the savage breast, but the angry feelings of a certain little girl. I am very glad, though, that it had that result; for I should not have liked you to go on hating me. That would never have done; and I'm afraid in that case we should have had to give up our trip to America."

She had a mischievous look about the eyes, which made me say:

"Perhaps you think that wouldn't have been so great a misfortune, after all, my Wayward Winifred!"

She laughed merrily, and replied:

"Don't think me ungrateful. I'm glad in some ways I came. 'Tis a wonderful country this America; and I have seen such beautiful, strange things."

"Not the golden streets," I observed; "nor the trees with gold leaves nor the birds with jewelled wings."

"No," she agreed; "I haven't seen anything like that, and I know those stories weren't true."

She sighed, as if for the dream that had vanished, and added:

"But I have seen so many beautiful things, and I am learning a great deal that I could never have learned with Granny and Niall."

Her shrewd child's wit had reached this conclusion unaided.

"And you have been so kind; I am grateful, and I do love you."

She said this with such pretty fervor and yet with that

sweet condescension that always made me feel as if a little princess were addressing me.

"You are getting to like the convent too?" I said.

"Oh, yes!" she cried; "it is so quiet and peaceful, like a church; and every one speaks nicely, and we hear so many things about God and our Blessed Mother and the saints. I am interested in a lot of things I never knew before; and my teachers are different from any people I ever knew before."

I was well satisfied; and when we returned to the convent parlor I had a talk with the Religious who presided there, while Winifred went off to get her wraps—she having obtained permission to accompany me as far as the gate. The Religious gave a very good account of Winifred. She declared that her training had made her different from other girls, and somewhat wayward and hard to control by ordinary means.

"At first," she said, "the rule and the monotony of convent life seemed most irksome to her, as well as the indoor existence, accustomed as she had been in Ireland to spend nearly all her time in the open air."

I nodded assent.

"Being quite undisciplined, too," she went on, "she was inclined to a certain waywardness of character, which it was hard to fight against."

"I can understand," I agreed.

"She was a very independent young lady when she first came, I assure you," the Religious said, smiling; "but, on the other hand, she is such a sweet, bright temperament, so wholesome, so generous, so innately refined—a thorough little lady. And she is so genuinely pious: nothing sentimental or overstrained in her devotion. She has the faith and fervor

of her country. Altogether, her nature is one susceptible of the highest training. Her very faults are lovable."

"I am so glad to hear you say all this!" I declared cordially; "for it fits in so well with the impression I had formed of her; and, though I met her as a stranger last summer, I have now the best of reasons for feeling a particular interest in her."

"Her intelligence is quite remarkable," went on the Religious. "Her mind is in some directions far in advance of her years, and she has really a fair share of education."

"You see she had for her teacher," I observed, "an eccentric but really learned kinsman."

"That accounts for it! And she has a good voice. Our music teachers are quite enthusiastic about it."

"She has a voice of uncommon sweetness and power," I assented. "I heard her singing on the Irish hills. Altogether, I hope the best from her stay with you."

We were here interrupted by Winifred herself, who appeared in her hat and coat. She made a graceful curtsy to the teacher, and together we went out arm in arm, walking over the crisp snow which had fallen over night and which sparkled in the sunlight; and looking away into the distance, where the afternoon was beginning to darken and the gray sky to take on a warmer glow. When we reached the gate we stood still a few minutes, Winifred looking wistfully out, as though she would fain have gone with me.

"It will be study hour when I get back," she told me; "and we have a lot of hard things for to-morrow. Did you find globes hard when you were at school?"

"Indeed I did," I said, remembering my own bewildered flounderings about in that particular branch of study.

"Well, we have them, and ancient history and algebra—

oh, that awful algebra!—to-morrow. So I think I must be going."

"Good-by!" I said; "and, Winifred, don't forget to say a prayer sometimes for your father, that you may see him again in this world, and both be happy together."

"I won't forget!" Winifred promised. "I always pray for my mother, who is dead."

"That is right, dear; but you must remember the living as well. And now good-by again!"

"I am going to run all the way back," she announced.

"Very well; I will stand and watch you. Now for the run! Let us see how quick you can get up the avenue."

She was off like a deer darting to cover; and it reminded me of the time when I had seen her running amongst the hills, springing lightly from peak to peak and almost horrifying me by her reckless movements.

"I should like her to have had a few years at the convent," I thought; "the refined atmosphere there would be just what she needs to tone down her high spirits and give her the touches she requires. But I suppose when Niall hears all he will be too impatient for the reunion with those he loves to wait. Besides, it would be unjust to Roderick. I must explain everything to him as soon as I get Niall's permission."

I pondered thus all the way to town, and wondered how soon I could hear from Ireland, and how I should pass the intervening time till my letters arrived. But in New York time flies, and the days seem all too short for the multitude of affairs; so that week followed week and ran into months before I realized that my letters remained unanswered.

CHAPTER XXIII.

WINIFRED TELLS HER NAME.

UNHAPPILY, the time went by without bringing any news of Niall, and the suspense became almost intolerable. I met Roderick O'Byrne once or twice; but he merely gave me a distant bow: I had no conversation with him whatever. Every morning I eagerly questioned the hotel clerk. The answer was always the same: "No, there are no letters."

Then Christmas came. Winifred spent the holidays with me, though I was in constant fear that she should meet with Roderick. One evening at a concert I chanced to look toward a side of the hall where a few men were walking to and fro in the pauses of the music. One who stood near the wall attracted my attention. It was Roderick O'Byrne, and he had evidently caught sight of us, and stood now with his eyes intently fixed upon Winifred's face. The remaining numbers on the programme fell on deaf ears, so far as I was concerned. I did not know what any one played or sang; I could not tell a rondo from a caprice, or if the violinist was accompanied by a flute or a violoncello. I had but one desire—to get out of the hall and away. I kept my eyes upon the programme, avoiding another look.

Presently Winifred touched my arm and whispered:

"Oh, see! he is right over there—the gentleman we met at the hotel."

She watched him as if fascinated; and I saw that their eyes met, exchanging a long, long look. Before the concert was over I arose hurriedly, and, complaining of the heat, told Winifred we must go at once. To my relief, Roderick made

no movement to follow us. His fine courtesy prevented him from a course of action so obviously distressing to me. Next day, however, I got a note from him, in which he said:

"The chance meeting of yesterday evening has confirmed me more than ever in the belief that the child whom you choose to surround with so much mystery is in some way connected with my life. The sight of her renewed once more those memories of the past, and filled me with a hope—so strong, if delusive—that I was misinformed regarding the supposed death of my daughter. If this child be not my own Winifred, she must be in some way related to my late wife. I implore you, by our years of friendship, to end my suspense by telling me whatever you may know of the girl. You will be doing the greatest possible service to

"Your devoted friend,

"RODERICK O'BYRNE."

I answered him at once as follows:

"I beg of you in turn, by our friendship, to wait. Give me a month or two, and I promise to relieve your suspense, or at least to give you such excellent reasons for my silence that you will no longer doubt the sincerity of my desire to serve you."

The note posted, I persecuted the clerk more than ever by my inquiries for letters, and I grumbled and growled at Niall and at Father Owen.

"Why on earth couldn't they answer, if it were only a line? What could they be thinking of? Didn't they know I must be intolerably anxious?"

This was the sum of my growling, and I continued it during all the Christmas holidays, when Winifred was with me; though, of course, I could say nothing to her. One afternoon, when I had been particularly anxious, I went out

with the child, spent a half hour at the cathedral, which was a daily haunt of mine, and then tried to control my feverish agitation by getting into a restless crowd of shoppers who thronged the department stores.

Winifred was delighted. It was a new experience. She never could get over her wonder, though, at the number of people in New York city.

"Where do they all come from?" she cried; "and where do they live? Are there houses enough for them all?"

I assured her that most of them were housed, though there was a sad proportion of them homeless. I brought tears to her eyes with the account I gave her, as we passed on to the quieter Fifth Avenue, of the sufferings of the poor in all big cities.

She talked on this subject most of the way home; and when I would have bought her some choice candies she begged me to give the money instead to the poor. This we did. I handed her the amount, with a little added thereto, and advised her to divide it amongst more than one. We met a blind man, and she gave him an alms; next was a miserable child, and after that a very old woman.

"There we have the Holy Family complete," I remarked; and her face lighted up at the suggestion.

"There are so many poor people here!" she said. "There were plenty of poor people in Ireland too; but I don't think they were quite as poor as these, and the neighbors always helped them."

"The poverty of a great city is worse, I think," I assented, "than it ever is in country places."

"Except in the famine times," said Winifred. "Oh, if you heard Niall tell about the famine in Ireland, and how some bad men and women went round trying to get the people

who were starving to give up their religion, and they wouldn't!"

The child's eyes shone and her whole face was aglow as she cried:

"Rather than give up their religion they died by the road eating grass. That was just splendid of them."

"Always keep that fine enthusiasm and that tender heart, dear child," said a voice.

We both turned quickly. I had little need to do so, for I knew the voice. It was Roderick O'Byrne's. Winifred looked into his face for a moment, then she held out her hand.

"I don't often speak to strangers," she declared, with her princess-like air, "but I like you."

Roderick O'Byrne's handsome face flushed, his lips parted eagerly as if to speak; but he restrained himself by a visible effort, and said after a pause:

"I hope some day you will like me better." Then he turned to me, still holding Winifred's hand in his own strong brown one. "Do not be afraid: I am not going to steal the little one away, and I am going to be patient and wait. But I was walking behind you and I heard the sweet voice—the voice so like one I loved very dearly in other days—and it was too hard to resist: I had to speak."

His voice took on that tone, half boyish, half pleading; and I felt compelled to say:

"If you are not patient, I will have to spirit my little one away from New York."

"Oh, don't do that!" he cried. "Let me see her sometimes—let me hear her voice, and I won't ask a question. See, I haven't even asked her name."

He had come round to my side, dropping his voice to an earnest whisper. But the child caught the last words.

"My name is Winifred," she said in answer to them.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Roderick, turning deadly pale; while I, seizing the child firmly by the hand, turned a corner abruptly and hastened into Broadway, where, as before on a similar oocasion, I took a cable car.

"And yet I have tried to be true to my trust," I repeated over and over to myself. "At the risk of losing Roderick's friendship, I have refused to answer any questions."

"Oh, why did you go and leave the gentleman like that?" asked Winifred, imperiously, as soon as we entered our rooms at the hotel. "It's a shame—I tell you it's a shame!" And she stamped her little foot on the carpet.

"Winifred!" I said severely. "You must be careful!"

"I don't care!" she cried. "I won't be good any more. It was very impolite to run away from that gentleman; and I wanted to talk to him, because I think I knew him once, or perhaps only dreamed about him."

I saw now that the *dénouement* was coming nearer and nearer. The matter was indeed being taken out of my hands. I determined, however, that I would be true to Niall; and that if some news did not soon come from Ireland, I should remove the child from New York and go with her, perhaps, to Canada. I rejoiced that the holidays were over and that to-morrow Winifred must return to school.

"It may not be for long," I warned her; "and then you may regret the advantages you have had here. You see, Niall may get too lonesome and send for you any time."

"I would love to see him and Granny and Father Owen and the others!" she exclaimed. "But if we went away to Ireland, I would like the dark gentleman to come too. Perhaps he would if you asked him."

"Everything will come right, I hope," I answered, evas-

ively. "And I am very glad you like the dark gentleman, because you may see him very often when you are older."

"Do you think so?" she asked eagerly. "Oh, I shall like that! But are you perfectly sure of it?"

"I am almost sure of it," I replied; and then, telling her that the bell was about to ring for the departure of visitors, I hurried away, for fear she might begin to question me too closely.

After that I had many lonely days of anxious waiting as the winter sped drearily away. February and then March drew their slow lengths along, and my letters were still unanswered. April was ushered in, more changeable than ever; mornings of sunshine being followed by afternoons of rain, and days of almost midsummer heat giving place to the chilliest of evenings.

One day I was sitting in my room at the hotel, embroidering a little, and disconsolately watching the throng on Broadway, when there came a knock at my door. A bell-boy entered with two letters upon a salver. My heart gave a great throb as I seized them, recognizing on both the Irish postmark. Broadway, with its throng of people, faded from before me; and I held the two letters in my hand—reading the address, now on one, now on the other, and putting off the moment of opening them; for I felt a curious dread. Suppose Niall should hold me to my promise or sternly command me to bring Winifred forthwith back to Ireland without even revealing her identity to Roderick? At last I broke the seal of one of the letters with a hand that trembled. I had to control a nervous agitation, which almost prevented me from seeing the characters before me, as with a pale face, I began to read.

CHAPTER XXIV.

LETTERS AT LAST.

THE letter I had opened was, I knew, from Niall. I remembered the strange, crabbed characters, almost resembling Arabic, in which he had written my letter of instruction.

"The hills of Wicklow," he began, "are streaming with sunlight. Their spurs are all golden, and the streams are rushing in great gladness, for they are full of joy. They have been freed from the bondage of winter.

"There is joy in the hills. It is sounding in my ears and in my heart. Words I dare not speak, daughter of the stranger! I can not put on paper the thoughts that are burning in my brain. You have found him, the beloved wanderer; and you have discovered that his heart has never wandered from us. I knew before now that he was not to blame; and of that I shall tell you some day, but not now.

"Had I wings, I would fly to Roderick and to my beautiful little lady. I love him, I love her. My heart has been seared by her absence. Until your letter came, the hills spoke a strange, new language, and I have heard no human speech. When your letter reached the village, I was up at my cabin in the hills, unconscious of good or evil, burning with fever. The good Samaritan found me out; who he is you can guess. It was long, long before my senses came back; and he would not read me your letter until I had grown strong. When I heard its contents, I feared even then that my brain would

turn. For two days I roamed the mountains. I fled to my cavern of the Phoul-a-Phooka for greater solitude. I could not speak of my joy—I dared not think of it.

"And now, O daughter of the stranger, heaven-sent from that land afar! bring her back to my heart, lest it break with the joy of this knowledge, and with sorrow that the sea still divides me from her, and that other equally beloved. Oh, what matters education now! Let the beautiful grow as the flowers grow, as the trees shoot up, clothed in beauty.

"Come now in all haste; and tell Roderick that on my knees I implore him to come too, that I may reveal all. Bid him hasten to Niall, the forlorn."

He broke off abruptly, with some words in Irish, which, of course, I did not understand. My own head was swimming; a great joy surged up in my heart, and I could almost have echoed Niall's wild rhapsody. When should I see poor Roderick and tell him—what? I had not yet made up my mind as to how I should fulfil that delightful task. However, I would write to him that very day and bid him come to hear the glad news.

I took up the other letter, which was, I doubted not, from Father Owen. Of course he could add nothing to my great happiness; still, it would be of the deepest interest to hear every detail relating to this matter of paramount importance. The letter was just as characteristic as Niall's had been; and I seemed to see the priest's genial face lighted up with pleasure, as he wrote, and to hear his kindly voice.

"Laus Deo!" began the letter. "What words of joy or praise can I find to express my own sentiments and those of the faithful hearts whose long years of waiting have been at last rewarded! I took your letter to Mrs. Meehan, and I had to use diplomacy—though that was a lost art with me, so

simple are my people and my duties—for fear the shock might be too great. But I don't think joy ever kills. I wish you could have seen her face—so tranquil, so trusting, illumined with the light of happiness. You can imagine the outburst of her praise rising up to the Creator, clear and strong as a lark's at morning. Barney and Moira were only restrained by my presence from cutting capers, and at last I said to them: 'Go out there now, Barney, my man, and you too, Moira, my colleen, and dance a jig in the courtyard; for I am pretty sure your legs won't keep still much longer.'

"And now of poor Niall! When your letter came I went in search of him. No one had seen him for a good while, and it was supposed he had gone off on some of his wanderings. None of the people would venture near his cabin, so I took my stick in my hand, and went there with the letter. I found the poor fellow in a sad plight—alone, burning with fever, delirious, and going over all kinds of queer scenes in his raving: now crying for 'gold, gold, gold!' or giving heart-piercing cries for Winifred. Again, he would be back in the past, with Roderick, a boy, at his side.

"Well, there was no one to take care of the creature; and, as it fitted in with my day's work, I took care of him myself. His gratitude, when he came to consciousness, was touching; and yet I had only followed the plainest dictates of humanity. When I thought my patient was strong enough, I read the letter to him. Bless my soul! it was like a whirlwind. He nearly took the breath out of me, rushing from the cabin in a kind of madness, and leaving me sitting there staring at the door by which he had gone. I did not see him for more than a week, and I assure you I was anxious. I was afraid he had lost his mind through excess of joy.

"To make a long story short, when he did come back

again I got hold of him entirely. Joy seems to have changed his nature as sunshine will purify a noisome spot. He is as gentle and tractable as a lamb; and better than all, his old faith and piety have come back to him. He goes to Mass and the sacraments. The light of heaven seemed to flow in on him with your letter. His sorrow for the past was like that of a child. I told him not to be disturbed about it, but just go on asking for mercy, mercy—only that and nothing more. 'For,' said I to him, 'my poor fellow, there's the eye of God looking down; and as it sees the noxious weed and the fairest flower, so it beholds our sins and our waywardness as well as our virtues. If these weeds of sin are plucked, the flowers of our virtues are just as fair in His sight.'

"But, O dear lady, how the old man sits and longs for the hour of reunion! He is out on the hills when their spurs are burnished gold, at the sunset hour; and he is there at the dawn waiting for the first beam to light up the Glen of the Dargle; he is out in the moonlight watching it making strange shapes out of the trees; and all the time with that one thought in his mind. He looks for gold no more, because he says his love of it was sinful; and the only treasures he seeks for now are the faces of his loved ones. Do not keep him long waiting, I entreat.

"Tell my pet, Winifred, the robin is out there now, busy as ever; and just bursting his breast with the joy of coming spring. I am proud and glad to hear of her success at the convent and sorry she has to leave it so soon. Say a prayer sometimes for the old priest in far-off Ireland, who soon will be slipping away to his rest—but not, he hopes, till he lays eyes on you again, and thanks you for the happiness you have brought to him and to the little ones of his flock."

I sat there for some time going over these letters, altern-

ately, and delighting in the pictures which their eloquent language evoked. To one thing I made up my mind; I should go back to Ireland and be present at the joyful meeting. Indeed, my eye brightened, my cheek glowed at the thought of seeing again those lovely scenes, and of the pleasant reunion of hearts at which I was to be present. But it was my turn to write a letter, or at least a very brief note, asking Roderick to come to me as soon as possible. That being Saturday, I thought I should have to wait till Monday for his visit.

Sunday passed in a feverish state of agitation. I was going out to supper in the evening, at the very same house where I had before met Roderick, but it was unlikely he would be there again. What was my surprise to see his tall figure standing near the fire talking to our hostess! He saluted me gravely. I thought he looked thin and worn; but at first he did not come near me: and I feared he had resolved to avoid me. As we were all making a move for supper, I managed to whisper:

"I wrote you a note yesterday. Please promise to comply with the request I make you in it."

He turned sharply:

"You wrote to me?" he queried.

"Yes," I answered.

"May I ask about what?"

Though the words were curt, Roderick's tone was genial and his face smiling.

"Merely asking you to come to see me to-morrow evening—but your partner is waiting, you must go."

He turned to the young girl beside him, with an apology for his momentary inattention. If his mind was inclined to wander from her to the subject of my approaching communi-

cation, he was too courteous and too accomplished a man of the world to let her perceive it. I was almost sorry I had spoken, lest it should spoil his supper. Several times I saw him looking at me; but I only smiled and went on talking to my partner, a brilliant lawyer with a great reputation for wit. Very soon after supper Roderick came over to me, with his usual almost boyish eagerness.

"What do you want to say to me?" he demanded, smiling yet imperious.

"How do you know I want to say anything?" I retorted, smiling back.

"Of course I know, and I am going to hear what it is, too!" he cried, seating himself beside me.

"Now, Roderick," I said, "if I were a charming young lady, such as that one you have just left, I could never resist that face and that voice. But as matters are, you'll just have to wait till I make up my mind to tell you; for spectacled eyes see without glamor, and gray hairs give us wisdom."

He laughed and his face took on a brighter look. I fancy that he knew by my tone I had good news to tell.

"I won't go to see you on Monday night," he declared, "unless you give me a hint."

"Well, I will give you a hint, and then you needn't come to see me."

"That is unkind."

"No; it would only be giving you trouble for nothing. The substance of what I have to say to you is this: that you must take a trip to Ireland very soon."

"Alone?"

"Yes, alone."

"And when I get there?"

"You'll be glad you went."

He pondered deeply, for some moments.

"Isn't this very like a fool's errand?" he inquired.

"Which is the fool, he who goes or she who sends?" I replied, mischievously.

"Can you ask?" he laughed. "A man is nearly always a fool when he does a woman's errand."

"But, seriously, you will go?"

He thought a little longer.

"I will," he answered, "if you will only promise me one thing."

"What is that?"

"That there will be an end of all this mystification."

"I promise you that, most solemnly," I answered. "Once on Irish soil, you shall know everything."

"Tell me now," he said, with sudden eagerness, "how is Winifred, asthore?"

There was a world of feeling in his voice, though he came out with the epithet laughingly.

"Well and happy," I assured him.

"Will you give her something from me?"

"I'm not so sure," I said, jestingly; "for you've quite won her heart already. She talks of nothing but the 'dark gentleman.'"

A glow of pleasure lit up his face.

"And now, what is it you want me to give her?"

He took a small box from his waistcoat pocket. It was the prettiest little ring, with a green stone in the center.

"The color of hope—the color of Ireland," Roderick observed.

"A good omen," I said, looking at the gem, where it lay sparkling in the wadding.

"You will give that to Winifred from her unknown friend," Roderick said.

"She will be delighted—though, you know, of course, she will not be allowed to wear it in the convent."

"Ah, she is in a convent!" he exclaimed. "But in any case, let her keep it as a reminder of me."

I thought as I watched him that if Winifred so closely resembled her dead mother, she was also like her father. His face was as mobile and expressive as hers, allowing always for the mask which the years are sure to put over every human countenance.

"You fancy there is a resemblance in this girl to your dead wife?"

"I know there is a resemblance to Winifred's dead mother," he answered.

I was silent though I had little reason for concealment henceforth.

"How cruel you have been all this time," he exclaimed, as he watched me; "I think it comes natural to your sex."

"Don't revile our sex for the faults of your own," I answered. "But tell me more about your dead wife."

His face changed and softened. Then a look came over it—a look of tender remembrance, which did him credit.

"She was very beautiful," he began, "at least I thought so. I met her when she was only fifteen. She was the image of what Winifred is now, only her beauty was more pronounced, and she had a haughtier air. I never forgot her from that moment. When she was eighteen, we were married. She was only twenty-four when she died, but I remember her still as vividly—"

He stopped, as though the subject were too painful, and then resumed, half dreamily:

"I am going to tell you now what will lend an added value to that little trinket I have given you for Winifred." He paused again, and drew a deep breath, looking at me hard. "It belonged to—to my wife, when she was a child of Winifred's age. Winifred will prize it, because it was—her mother's."

I stood up, and Roderick, rising also, confronted me.

"Can you deny it?" he asked defiantly.

I was silent.

"Pray what is the object of further secrecy?" he pleaded. "Tell me, is not Winifred my child, the child of my dead wife?"

I bowed my head in assent. Concealment was neither useful nor desirable any longer.

The look of triumph, of exaltation, of joy, which swept over his face was good to see.

"But you will wait?" I pleaded, in my return. "You will go to Ireland, as agreed, and your child shall be all your own entirely and forever?"

"I will wait," he answered quietly, "though it is hard."

And then we shook hands and parted. I felt that I must hurry away: for I could not go on talking of commonplace subjects, either to Roderick or to any of the others. As I took leave of our hostess she said, laughingly:

"You and Mr. O'Byrne were quite melodramatic, standing over there a few moments ago."

I laughed, but I did not give her any information. When I got home I wrote to Niall, telling him that in a month or two at furthest I would bring Winifred back, but that I wanted to show her a little of the American continent before taking her home. On my next visit to the convent, I did not say a word to the child—I was afraid it would unsettle her

for her school-work, but I informed her teachers that it would be necessary to withdraw her before the expiration of the term. After the trip which I intended to take with her to Niagara and a few other points of interest, I determined to cross the ocean once more and bring Winifred safely back to Niall. I should let Roderick sail by the Cunard line, while we would take passage by the White Star line, so that our arrival would be almost simultaneous.

I presented Winifred with her ring, though at the time I did not tell her it had been her mother's. She was more than delighted, as I had foreseen, and put it at once upon her finger. She was vexed, and indulged in one of her childish outbursts of petulance, when I explained to her that wearing it was against the rules. She had to be content with keeping it where she could look at it, very often. She sent a very pretty message to Roderick.

"Tell him," she said, "I remember him when the birds sing, when the organ plays, when the sun shines—whenever there is happiness in my heart."

CHAPTER XXV.

HOME AGAIN.

THE next few weeks were full of the bustle of preparation. When I told Winifred she was to leave the convent before the end of the term, and, after a few weeks of travel, to return to Ireland, she seemed fairly dazed at the unexpected news.

"Her education, of course, will have to be continued," I thought; "but hardly in an American convent."

One May morning Winifred took leave of her teachers and school friends, and we set out direct for Niagara. When we reached the Falls, she was for a time wholly lost in wonder. The stupendous mass of falling water seemed to produce upon the little girl a curious impression of bewilderment.

"Oh, it is grand, grand!" she said. "This America is a wonderful place."

Winifred and I had, as it were, a surfeit of beauty; and so by the afternoon our exclamations of wonder and delight became exhausted, and we could only look out upon the lovely and varied panorama in silence. But we were roused to excitement as the afternoon sun began to take a downward slope and we neared the far-famed Rapids. The passengers braced themselves as if for certain danger (though in reality there is comparatively little) as the steamer rushed into the great

masses of foaming water with a lurch and a bound that sent a tingle to every nerve. Onward she dashed, the speed seeming to become more terrific as we descended the river in the direction of Montreal. It is a thrilling, though delightful, experience. As for Winifred, she seemed to enjoy the situation thoroughly. Not a shade of alarm crossed her face, while many of the older passengers were visibly agitated. From the steamer's deck we took a last glimpse of the city, lying golden in the sunset, with the figure of Our Lady of Good Help on the tower of Bonsecours church, stretching wide its arms in benediction over the great river which Cartier discovered.

At dawn we were nearing Quebec, and rushed out of our cabins for a first sight of the Gibraltar of America. We flew past Levis, Sillery, and, rounding Cape Diamond, suddenly beheld the ancient walls, the colossal rock crowned by the citadel, with Lower Town, squalid if picturesque, at its feet. Landing, Winifred and I took a *calèche* to the Chateau Frontenac, where we breakfasted.

Recrossing the American borders, we made a short trip through the White Mountain region, exulting in those glorious scenes. At New York we rested a day or two in our old quarters, and did a good deal of shopping; for had we not Granny and Niall and Father Owen to think of, not to speak of Barney and Moira, the landlord of the inn, and other Wicklow notables? No one was to be forgotten.

After this we went into Pennsylvania, one of the most wonderful of all the States, and crossed the far-famed Horseshoe bend in the Alleghanies. Winifred looked fearlessly down into the vast chasm and saw with composure the end of our train on the other side of the ravine. It was a sight upon which few could look unmoved. We saw something of the

wonders of the mining and coal districts, and the beauty of the Delaware and Lehigh.

We continued our breathless journey to Washington, where we remained a few days to rest. It is a beautiful city, refreshing to mind and body, though somewhat warm at that season of the year; but its noble dwellings, its public monuments, surpassed and overtopped by the Capitol, have a wonderful charm.

One evening we were strolling along in the very shadow of that classic pile when Winifred said:

"Barney and Moira will think I've been in fairyland if I tell them half of all I have seen; but I love dear Ireland best, after all."

"We shall sail from New York by the next White Star liner," I observed presently; and I thought within myself: "Roderick will be sailing by the Cunarder. It will be a race which shall reach Liverpool first."

By an odd coincidence, as I thought thus, Winifred was turning round upon her finger the ring which Roderick had sent her.

"I should like to have seen him," she said, pointing to the ring, "and thanked him for this. I suppose I shall never see him again. I have a strange fancy that I saw him long ago, and that he is—" she hesitated— "that he is the dark gentleman who was angry with the lady in yellow," she concluded, slowly.

"Dreaming again, Winifred!" I said.

"This is not dreaming," she corrected; "for sometimes I am almost sure it is true, and that he is the same one—only I have never seen him angry."

"Perhaps the dark gentleman was not so very angry even then," I suggested, to divert her thoughts from Roderick.

"Perhaps not," she said reflectively; "but I think he was."

"Your father—for the gentleman you speak of was, I suppose, your father—was devotedly attached to your mother."

"Was he?" inquired Winifred, simply.

"Yes, indeed: he thought her the most beautiful creature in the world."

"I'm glad of that," Winifred said; and, in that fashion of hers which so constantly reminded me of her father, she turned away from the subject.

On Saturday morning early we were on board the great steamer, in all the bustle of departure; and after a pleasant voyage we arrived at Liverpool on schedule time, as the guidebooks say, and installed ourselves for the night at a comfortable hotel. Next day we set forth to see whatever this smoky city of industry has to show. We were passing along one of the smokiest and narrowest of streets when Winifred suddenly pulled my arm.

"Did you see him?" she cried excitedly.

"Who?" I inquired, though I partly guessed—being fully prepared to see Roderick O'Byrne in Liverpool.

Winifred touched the ring on her finger to show whom she meant.

"It may have been only a chance resemblance," I observed evasively.

"It was *he*," she declared decisively, and her eyes sparkled with excitement. "Oh, I am so glad!" she went on. "We must find him. I want to thank him for the ring."

"It will be impossible to find him in this crowd," I answered.

She pointed to a shop.

"He is in there," she cried, "and I must see him! If you do not come with me, I will go myself."

She was full of her old impetuosity, urging on my reluctant steps.

"One thing that I want to ask him," she went on, "is whether he knew the beautiful lady in yellow."

When we reached the shop door, Roderick stood just inside; and I almost fancied he had stepped in there to avoid us, knowing that I did not wish for a premature *dénouement* of the little plot. However, his face also wore an eager expression, and it lighted as Winifred confronted him. He opened the door and came out onto the pavement, looking at me for directions. I put my finger to my lips, signifying that he must not as yet disclose himself.

"I want to thank you for this ring, with its lovely green stone," she said.

"It's only a trifle, little one," Roderick replied lightly.

"I was so sorry when I thought I should never see you again," Winifred cried, impetuously.

"Were you?" asked Roderick, with an unsteadiness in his voice which caused me to give him a warning look.

"Yes, because I was leaving America forever. And one thing I wanted to ask you so much was, if you remembered the beautiful lady in yellow. I have been so anxious to know."

She looked up into his face with her great, starlike eyes; and he gazed at her in return.

"Do I remember the beautiful lady in yellow?" he repeated. "As I hope for heaven, yes, and never shall I forget her while I live!"

The answer, however, was given in an undertone, which she did not catch.

"Because if you knew her," went on Winifred, "I was going to ask if you were the dark gentleman who slammed the door?"

"I'm afraid I was," he whispered in my ear. "How our misdeeds do follow us, and what a memory the little one has! I had had a dispute with some one very dear to me about going to the old place in Wicklow. She, poor girl, had no wish to see the 'ruin,' as she called it. I lost my temper, and so came about the little scene Winifred remembers and describes."

Turning to Winifred, he asked:

"Now, why do you think I could do such a naughty thing as slam a door?"

Winifred was confused. Her natural politeness prevented her from replying.

"Am I so very fierce-looking or so violent?" Roderick resumed; for he was in high spirits and ready to carry the mystery further.

"It isn't that," answered Winifred; "only you look like him."

"Look like a gentleman that got angry and slammed a door?" he said in the same jesting tone. "Now, that is too bad of you altogether."

His bright, laughing face and sunny manner mystified the child even more than his words.

"Never mind," he went on; "I forgive you this time, but you must really try to get up a better opinion of me. I must go now, but we shall meet again, and it won't be over the seas either. I am going to hear more about that uncivil dark gentleman who frightened a dear little girl."

"He was cross, too, to the lady," said Winifred, rather defiantly; for she was vexed somewhat by his jesting.

"Well, I am sure he was sorry enough for that afterward," said Roderick, with a sudden clouding of his face—"as we are always sorry for our fits of ill-temper. Remember that, my child."

He waved his hand in farewell, and Winifred stood looking after him.

"I am glad we are going to see him again," she observed; though, with the implicit faith of childhood, she did not ask when or where.

When we had got back to the hotel she talked chiefly of Granny and Niall, of Father Owen, and of her humble friends Barney and Moira; and could scarcely wait for the night to be over and morning to come that we might set out for the scenes of her childhood.

The most impatiently longed-for morrow comes at last. It was a gray, lowering day when we left Liverpool. Before quitting the hotel, a box of candy was handed to Winifred. When she opened it there was a card upon which was written:

"From the man that looks like the naughty dark gentleman who slammed the door."

It seemed as if it must be a dream when we drove in a hired car from Dublin once more to the Glen of the Dargle. I had written to the landlord of the neighboring inn to have our rooms in readiness. And there he was at his door, stony-visaged and reticent; but the stone was furrowed by a broad smile as he helped us from the car.

"Welcome back, ma'am! And welcome to you too, Miss Winifred alanna!"

Winifred shook him cordially by the hand; and turned with a cry of joy to where Moira stood, red in the redness of the dying sun which shone out through a mist—for the weather had been uncertain all that day; and red, too, with a new shyness, which caused her to stand plucking at her apron. Barney kept urging her forward, but was not much more confident himself.

Winifred's greeting to them was good to hear. And she wound up by the flattering assurance:

"You'll think I'm a real fairy this time when you see my trunks open to-morrow."

It was some time, however, before that pair of rustic tongues were unloosed and they began to chatter away like magpies. After a little while Winifred proposed a run; and off they all flew, the young traveler, in spite of the fatigue of her journey, leading in the race. Her curls, which had grown longer in her absence, formed a cloud about her head.

"Father Owen bid me tell you he was off for a sick-call, down to Enniskerry below there; but he'd be back in an hour's time, and you'll see him as quick as he comes," said the landlord.

"It's good to get back again," I said, seating myself on the familiar bench at the door, and letting my eyes wander over the lovely scenes—the blossoming trees, the gold of the laburnum, and the whole sweetened by the pervading fragrance of the hawthorn.

"We're proud to have you with us, ma'am," the landlord declared. "We thought the time long since you left."

The "we" referred to his better half, who, however, rarely left the kitchen, and with whom I had not exchanged half a dozen words.

"I don't think I'll ever go away, again," I said; "so you may just as well arrange my rooms accordingly. And now what of the schoolmaster?"

"They tell me," he said, speaking in a confidential undertone, "that Father Owen exorcised him—took off of him some spell that the 'good people' had laid upon him, forcing him to wander night and day—and scatterin' his wits."

"At any rate, Niall of the hills has changed his ways, I hear," said I.

"Well, so they tell me; though there are them that met him wanderin' still on the hills. But sure mebbe the poor daft crathure was only takin' the air by moonlight."

"And Granny Meehan?" I inquired.

"Oh, she's to the fore! And it's her ould heart that'll be rejoiced entirely by your return, not to speak of her colleen."

At that moment Winifred entered, with Barney and Moira thrown into the background by Father Owen himself, who held his little favorite by the hand.

"A hundred thousand welcomes!" cried the priest, extending his unoccupied hand to me. "So you have brought us back the old Winifred, with a new varnish upon her that shines from afar. God be praised that we're all here to greet you!"

The landlord, with an exclamation at their dilatoriness in serving supper, entered the inn, while Father Owen and I moved apart for a few moments. I wanted to tell him that Roderick would arrive in a day or two.

"Thanks be to God!" he ejaculated. "Oh, what joy you have brought upon the old house—*you,* under God! It is a privilege thus to make others happy—the sweetest left us since the fall of Adam. But now I mustn't keep you from your supper. We'll have many a long chat in the days to come, and I just wanted to welcome you. I suppose you'll go up this evening to Granny and Niall?"

"Indeed I will. But is Niall at the castle?" I asked.

"He is. Granny will tell you all," he answered.

And what a supper that was in the pleasant inn parlor, with the blossoming trees peeping in at the windows and the Irish robins singing our welcome! How savory tasted the trout from the stream, fresh-caught; and the rasher of bacon, with snow-white oaten cake, the freshest of fresh

butter, and thick cream for our tea! What a walk we had up through the hills that lovely evening! Winifred's eyes were full of tears as I recalled to her memory the first time she had brought me to the castle.

"Isn't it strange to think of all that has passed since then!" she whispered, in a voice full of emotion.

But though changes there had been, there were none in the hills. They preserved their immortal beauty, and the Glen of the Dargle was as fairy-like as ever in its loveliness. At the castle, too, all was the same. Granny sat calm and motionless by the great hearth, as though she were under a spell; and Brown Peter mewed and purred about her as of old. When we entered the room she rose uncertainly from her chair. Her voice was plaintive and tremulous with the depth of emotion as she cried out:

"Winifred alanna, is it yourself that's in it?"

Presently the child was clasped in her arms; and I stood by, content to be forgotten. At last I asked:

"Where is Niall?"

"Barney will bring you to him," said the blind woman.

After a moment he led us to that very hall where the game of chess had been played on the silver chessboard for the hand of a fair lady. Here Niall had established himself, and I caught a glimpse of his tall figure walking up and down. I remained without, and sent Winifred in alone. I heard one inarticulate cry of joy, and then I walked away to a distant end of the corridor, leaving the two together for a while. When I returned and entered the hall, I found Niall seated in a high-backed armchair, like some king of olden days. Winifred was upon her knees beside him, leaning her head on his arm. He held out his hand to me, and I was struck by his altered expression. Scarce a trace of its former

wildness remained; and his face shone with a deep content, a radiating joy.

"Daughter of the stranger," he said, "you are one of us forever! Whether your home be here amongst our hills or the stormy sea divides us, it matters nothing."

"It is my intention to stay here," I announced, "amongst your lovely scenes, and with you all, who have come so intimately into my lonely life."

CHAPTER XXVI.

RODERICK RETURNS, AND ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL.

THE great day of Roderick's home-coming dawned; and a glorious one it was, as if Nature were in harmony with our joy. The birds sang a perfect chorus in the early morning; the blossoming trees never smelled so sweet, the hills never blended light and shade more exquisitely, nor the streams reflected a bluer sky, than when the car containing Roderick O'Byrne drove up to the inn. He sprang out with a boyish lightness.

"Mr. Roderick O'Byrne," I exclaimed, "Nature is singing a perfect hymn for your home-coming!"

"My heart is singing too," he replied. "All I love are here before me."

When we had cordially shaken hands, I said to him:

"Now be very practical and prosaic. Come in and have something to eat."

"Oh, I couldn't!" he cried. "Let us go at once to them."

I saw his eyes wandering round in search of Winifred.

"Control your impatience just a little while longer," I observed, "and take a sensible meal."

"More mystifications, more delays, O woman of many mysteries!"

"Only one," I explained. "I want you and Winifred to meet in the Dargle; though she will probably think you have been evolved from the ground by one of her favorite fairies."

He laughed.

"If it is your whim, I must submit; for you have been

the goddess behind the machine from the first. Continue to manage us puppets as you will."

"Only for to-day," I replied merrily; "after that I shall disclaim all power over you."

He followed me into the inn parlor, where the table was laid out; and, having taken a slight repast, was eager to be up and away once more. I had not told the landlord who my guest was, lest any hint of his advent should prematurely get abroad; but I saw the worthy man shading his eyes with his hand and peering at him, now coming to the door and now retreating. At last, as we rose from table, he burst in upon us.

"Ah, then, Master Roderick, is it yourself that's in it!" And he fell to laughing almost hysterically as he seized and wrung the outstretched hand, which Roderick, quick to respond to any touch of genuine feeling, extended. He called the man by name, and began to recall many a pleasant incident of boyhood's days. The delight of mine host of the stony visage all but drew tears from my eyes. We enjoined secrecy upon him; and then Roderick and I set off for the Dargle, where I had bidden Winifred to wait for me.

"It is a lovely spot for such a meeting," I observed to Roderick as we went.

"Lovely indeed," he answered. "My eyes have hungered for a sight of it these ten years."

We walked on in silence toward it; Roderick taking off his hat that the breeze might blow through his hair, and drinking in the beauty around us with visible gratification.

"An exile's heart never warms in the land of the stranger," Roderick declared presently. "There's something in the native air that gladdens the soul."

"Now," I said, as we entered the beautiful glen, with

its atmosphere of poetry, its softened, delicate loveliness, "here it was I first met Winifred, and here she shall meet you, and you can tell your tale your own way."

I had arranged matters a little melodramatically; Winifred unconsciously added to the effect by taking her seat upon her favorite tree, and, out of the pure gladness of her heart, singing a wild song full of trills and quavers like the notes of a bird. I slipped away among the trees, and presently Roderick spoke. His voice was soft and tender:

"Winifred asthore machree!"

Winifred looked at him long and strangely for a few seconds, then she abandoned her perilous perch and came running down to him swift as a bird upon the wing. Nature was speaking very loud in her heart. Roderick stood waiting for her, holding out both his hands. He took her slender ones and held them, looking at her with a long, long look of tender affection; then, releasing his right hand, he took from his watch chain a locket and opened it. Within, I learned later, was a beautiful miniature on ivory. Winifred gave a swift, startled cry of joy:

"The lady in yellow—oh, it is the beautiful lady!"

"And I am the dark gentleman, my little one," Roderick whispered. "Do you know who he was?"

"Yes," said Winifred, looking up into his face: "he was my father."

"Have you forgiven him for being cross and slamming the door?"

She nodded gravely.

"And are you going to love him—to love me very much?"

For answer, Winifred threw her arms round his neck, weeping for very joy.

At that moment I left them, and they followed slowly

up to the castle, Winifred clinging to her father's arm and telling him how she had loved him almost from the first. And now a happy and complete confidence was already established between them.

As they entered the kitchen, I was there with Granny, having prepared her somewhat for what was to come. She arose, tottering upon her feet and trembling.

"Son of my heart, Roderick avick!" she cried; and Roderick took the old woman in his strong arms and clasped her close, whilst the tears fell unheeded down his cheeks. Even the old woman's love for Winifred had not been so great as this other love which she had so long cherished in her heart of hearts.

"I can not see you, my boy," she whispered; "but beautiful as the Mayflowers in the sun of morning is your coming, and gladdening to my old heart as the first air of spring. Glory be to God and praise and thanksgiving that I have been spared to see this day!"

Whilst she still spoke we heard a step coming along the stone passage, and the tall figure of Niall entered the room. He advanced straight to Roderick, and, to our amazement, he bent the knee.

"The O'Byrne has come home again!" he announced solemnly. "The scion of the younger branch does him homage."

"What's that you're sayin' about the younger branch?" exclaimed Granny, beginning to tremble again. "And who are you that talks so?"

"I am Niall O'Byrne, the uncle of Roderick and of Winifred."

Winifred gave a cry of surprise, but poor Granny went on with the same trembling uncertainty:

"And you've been alive all this time?"

"Certainly."

"You didn't take any shape?"

"Only that of the mad schoolmaster," Niall explained, with a grim smile.

"So that's who he was, praise and glory to God!" cried the simple old woman. "And I to be afeard of him when he'd come hauntin' the house at all hours and goin' on with his quare ways! But sure I might have known—indeed I might!"

Granny had known Niall in his younger days, before his departure for the East; but after his mysterious return she, being blind, had never been able to recognize him, and he had purposely kept her in ignorance. She had therefore shared all the misgivings of the countryside in regard to the treasure-seeker, who from the nature of his pursuits had sought to conceal his identity.

The tears rolled down the old man's cheeks and he made more than one vain attempt to speak; while Winifred patted his arm, saying:

"Don't cry, dear Niall—don't cry! We have my father back again."

At last, mastering his emotion by an effort, and looking into the handsome, kindly face before him, Niall spoke:

"I knelt to you just now as to the head of our house, the representative of the elder branch; but I should have knelt as a penitent."

"A penitent!" repeated Roderick, in surprise.

"I deceived you, I caused you years of suffering!" cried Niall, in a voice of overmastering agony. "But, oh, it was my love for you, for her, for the old place, that urged me to it!"

"Such faults are easily pardoned," said Roderick, believing that the old man was laboring under some delusion.

"Wait till you hear!" said Niall, almost sternly. "A judge must hear the offence before he can pardon. 'Twas I who wrote to you that Winifred was dead."

"*You?*" exclaimed Roderick, the most unbounded amazement depicted on his face, and for a moment something of Niall's own sternness clouding its good-humor. "Why should you have done that to me?"

"Listen!" said Niall, extending one hand as if in supplication. "I heard you had remarried in America, and that was a sad blow to my hopes and dreams. You would never come back. Even if my plans succeeded, you would never dwell in the old place. And then came the agonizing thought that you would take Winifred away, and that with me our very name would pass from Wicklow. I deliberately deceived you. I withheld from Granny Meehan the letter you had written her."

Granny made an exclamation of "God forgive you!" For she, too, had suffered from that wrong.

"I caused your letters to the priest to miscarry; I did everything, in short, to cut you off from communication with this place. And by hints which I threw out, and vague messages which I sent through Winifred to Mrs. Meehan, I filled her mind with a fear and distrust of America and people coming from there. Oh, I remember what anguish I endured when this lady first came into this region! I could have killed her where she stood. I believed her to be the second wife herself or some emissary from you come to spy upon us and discover our secret."

Roderick stood all this time, his arms crossed upon his breast, a proud look upon his face.

"And did you think all this of me?" he asked at last—"that I would forget home and kindred, forget the wife who lies sleeping in Irish soil, and, taking away my child, abandon you all forever? Ah, Niall, you little knew me, after all!"

"But I had suffered, Roderick; sometimes my mind wandered, perhaps, a little," pleaded the old man, pathetically. "There was a confusion there; and I only knew that if Winifred went away, you were both lost to me forever."

Roderick's face softened. His great generous heart touched by that appeal, he cried out:

"Uncle, dear uncle, let us not talk of forgiveness, but only of your long years of devotion to us all! We will speak no more of what is painful. Now all is peace and joy."

Father Owen entered just at that moment, full of genial sympathy and heartfelt, simple delight; and with his coming the reconciliation was perfect. It took Winifred some time indeed to understand her new relation to Niall; but she said that in any case she could not love him any better, though she was glad he belonged to the old castle and the old race.

The ornaments from Niall's cavern were disposed of to advantage, and it was a great day when we all went with Roderick to the cavern of the Phoul-a-Phooka to examine them. The gold was removed to a bank; and, as Roderick had brought some considerable savings from America, the work of restoration on the castle was begun. It was not, of course, necessary or desirable that the whole edifice should be restored to its pristine splendor; and some of the ruin remained in all its picturesqueness as a show place for travelers. But the main building was made both habitable and imposing. By some strange convulsion of nature, the cavern in which Niall had concealed his treasures, and where he had

spent many a lonely night, was destroyed. The rocks fell in, and then the mountain stream gushed through it, sweeping away all trace of that singular abode.

Roderick's return, Winifred's identity as heiress of the O'Byrnes, and Niall's kinship with the family, were publicly announced to the village, all mysteries being at last cleared up. But the landlord voiced public sentiment in confiding to me that the "good people" were surely mixed up in the affair, and that it was the removal of the fairy spell bewitching Niall, and perhaps Winifred, which had made all come right.

Roderick was from the first the idol of the peasantry, to whom he endeared himself in every possible manner. His warm Irish nature had never grown cold by change or vicissitude, and he labored in a hundred ways to improve the position of his people. He was still in their eyes the handsome and high-spirited lad who had galloped over the country on his white horse.

I became a fixture at the inn; though most of my time was spent at the castle, where our little circle was often cheered by the presence of Father Owen. Niall at times unbent into positive geniality; and as we sat occasionally in homely fashion around the kitchen hearth, that Granny might not be excluded from our conferences, and that Barney and Moira might draw near unchecked, he told us many a strange tale of his adventures as a gold-seeker. Sometimes he brought us to the Far East, relating his inquiries into the occult arts or the researches of alchemists; and again he led us, by many a devious path, through the hills of his native Wicklow and along the banks of its streams. Many of his accounts sounded like some fabulous tale, a page from an old enchanter's book. Roderick, who knew that gold, even to the

amount of ten thousand pounds, had been in former years found in Wicklow, and that mines under government control had been established there, was far less surprised than the rest of us had been that Niall had succeeded in wresting a certain amount of treasure from the earth.

And Winifred was never again sent away to school. She had a governess, and she had Niall to direct her studies, Roderick himself taking an interest in them. Her pranks are still told as of yore; for—pious, good, exemplary as she is in the main, and ruled absolutely by her father, whose will to her is law—she has her outbursts of petulance, and her old delight in playing a trick now and again on the unwary; or she will mystify her nearest and dearest by indulging in the unexpected; so that many there are who still know and love her as Wayward Winifred.

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